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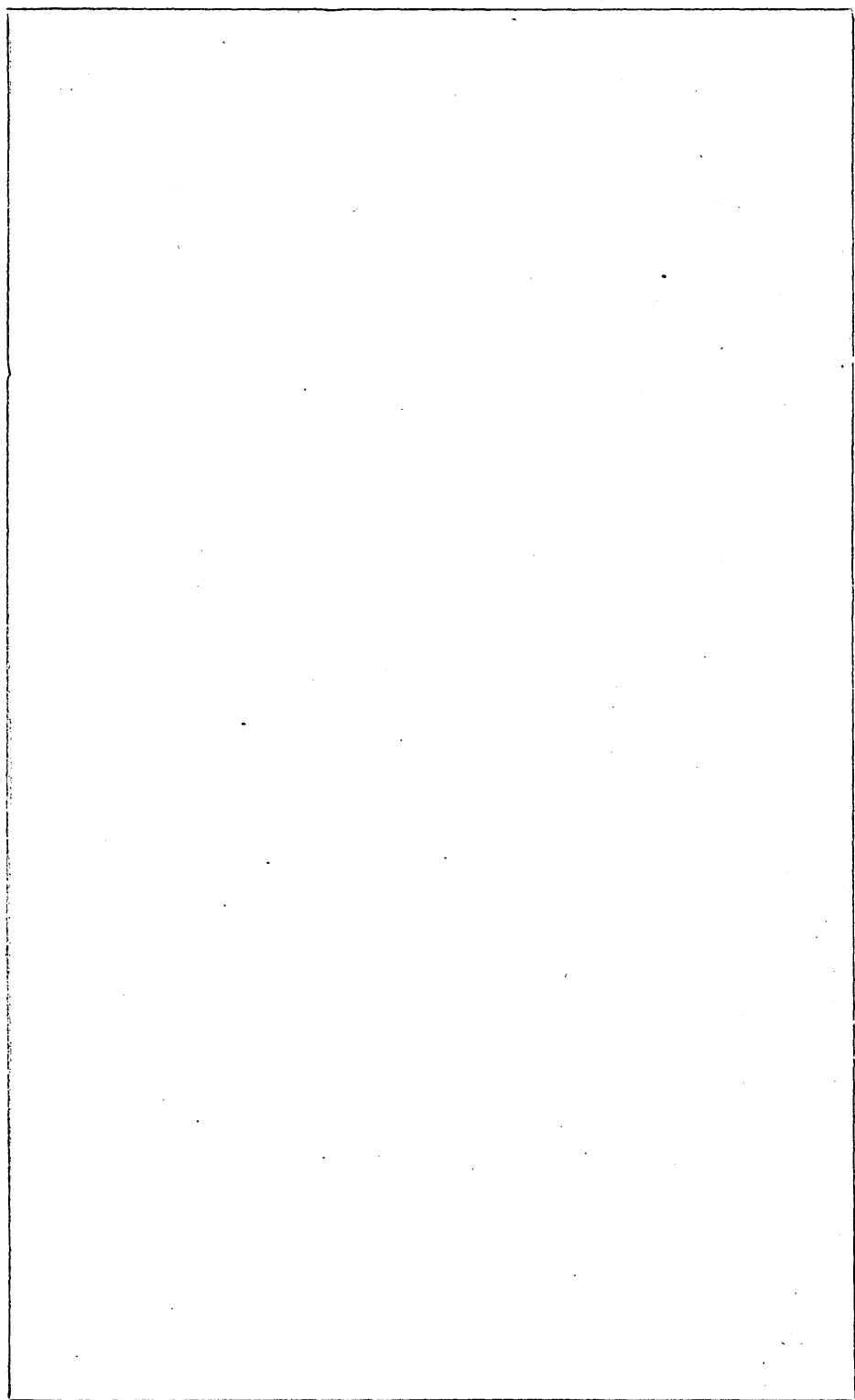


Baptist Union Theol. Sem. Coll.





LIGHT AND TRUTH.



Light and Truth:

OR,

Bible Thoughts and Themes.

The Gospels.

BY

HORATIUS BONAR, D.D.

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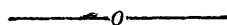
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Bible Thoughts and Themes.



I.

VERY MAN.

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”—MATT. I. 1.

THIS first verse of Matthew's Gospel contrasts strikingly with the first verse of John's; this human pedigree of the Son of God reads strangely when placed side by side with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Yet it all the more exhibits the true Person of Him who was the “Word made flesh,”—“God manifest in flesh,”—true and very man, yet also true and very God.

As we take Matthew's history literally, so do we take that of John. If we allegorize the first chapter of the one evangelist, we must allegorize the first of the other. If John does not mean that Christ was very God, Matthew does not mean that He was very man. The *divine* side of Christianity is as strongly shewn in the one evangelist as the *human* side in the other. He whom we call Lord and Master, Saviour and Redeemer, is one in whose Per-

son the extremes of all being unite. All Godhead and all creaturehood are in Him ; the fulness of the finite, and the fulness of the infinite ; all the excellence of the created and the uncreated.

I. *He is a man.* He is not in this chapter expressly called "Son of Adam" ; but in Luke's genealogy we find this designation ; and apart from that, the whole of this chapter is a historical exhibition of his true and very manhood. He is of the same stock as we are,—the same ancient root,—the first man Adam, whom God created. He is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh ; "God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). In everything that is truly human He is one of us. He "knew no sin" ; He was "that holy thing" ; yet was He all the more *human* because of the absence of sin ; for sin is not an original part of our nature. As man, then, He sympathises ; He pities ; He loves. As man, He "loved his neighbour as himself," and so "fulfilled the royal law of love." As man, He was born, He lived, He "grew in stature, and in wisdom, and in favour with God and man" (Luke ii. 52). His was thoroughly a human body and a human soul ; his was thoroughly a human life and a human death. His was human hunger and thirst, human sleep and waking, human weariness and rest. His words were human words, issuing from human lips, and the utterance of a human heart. His looks were human looks, his tones were human tones, his tears were human tears. He was man all over, yet sinless ; man all over, living in man's world, yet not partaker of that world's evil ; man all over in every step He took, and every word He spoke ;

man all over in his daily intercourse with his fellow-men, and in his fellowship with his Father in heaven.

II. *He is a Jew.* God's purposes concerning earth have always unfolded themselves by election and selection,—of men, of places, of nations. Church-history is the record and manifestation of the electing and selecting will of a Sovereign God. There are elect nations and countries as well as elect souls. Israel was God's elect nation of old, Canaan his elect land, Jerusalem his elect city, and Zion his elect hill. This national election began with individual election,—Abraham. From the day of his being chosen, God's purpose centred in a nation,—the nation that was to spring from him. The Jew was chosen to be the first of nations,—to rise above the civilised Greek and the mighty Roman. The Jew was to be the centre of God's workings and teachings. The Jew was to be the race with which Godhead was to be connected. Messiah was to be son of Abraham,—son of the great believer. And it was so ; the seed of Abraham was that portion of the seed of the woman from which Messiah came. Jesus was a Jew ; a son of Abraham ; a scion of that race to whom God had committed his oracles and his covenant ; in connection with whom the true history of our race is connected : "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the Son of Abraham."

III. *He is a King.* He is of David's royal stock,—the God-selected family, for whom Israel's crown was destined for ever. God first narrows the circle of humanity to Abraham's race ; then He limits that circle to the tribe of Judah ; then he selects from that tribe David's family.

Kingship in Israel was to be connected with David and his line. Messiah came not only as the son of Judah, but as the son of David,—heir to Israel's crown,—heir apparent to the throne of the world. Jesus of Bethlehem, Jesus of Nazareth is our King ; son of David as well as son of Abraham. The crown of the world, nay, of the universe, is on the head of a Jew,—a son of David, a son of Abraham.

In all this, however, we find that others are interested besides Israel. Angels are interested, for it is through Gabriel that the announcement is made (Luke i. 26), and “angels desire to look into these things”; the Gentiles are interested, for Rahab and Ruth are among the Messiah's ancestors ; the chief of sinners are interested, for in his line we find some of the worst ; everything in this verse and chapter assures us that heaven and earth are, in all their regions, interested in this wondrous birth. The tidings are for all ; they are to be preached “to every creature that is under heaven.”

But, further, we learn here something concerning God's purpose,—his purpose of grace and blessing,—to which it will be well to give heed ; for that purpose bears upon us and on our earth on every side. It is a purpose of love. God has loved the world, and sent his Son !

(1.) *God's purpose is to bless by a man.* It is a human channel that is to be made use of for blessing earth. Salvation comes by a *man*. The Saviour is a *man*. Everything connected with blessing to the race or to earth comes through a man ; the son of David, son of Abraham, son of Adam,—child of Mary !

(2.) *God's purpose is to teach by a man.* Earth is to have

a *human*, not an angelic prophet. From *human* lips are all our lessons to come. He who was to teach humanity, was to be a man ; He who was to say, "Learn of me," was to be one of ourselves. It was in a man that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were to be hidden for us.

(3.) *God's purpose is to judge by a man.* The Father does not judge, but has committed all judgment to the Son. Judgment is given to Him because He is the Son of man (John v. 27). It is as Son of man that He sits upon the throne of his glory (Matt. xxv. 31).

(4.) *God's purpose is to rule by a man.* The King both of earth and heaven is to be son of David and son of Abraham. "The man Christ Jesus" is heir of the throne of David as well as possessor of the throne of heaven. The crown of all the earth is to be placed on the head of a man. Human hands are to wield the sceptre of the universe.

(5.) *God's purpose is to link heaven and earth together by a man.* It is in the man Christ Jesus that the reconciliation takes place between them. It is by this man that the nearness is to be maintained for ever. He is the bridge, the ladder, the chain, the golden clasp that is to knit together the heavenly and earthly regions and races. Round this *human centre* the universe is to revolve.

Glad tidings ! The woman's seed has at length come to our rescue from the hands of our great enemy ! Glad tidings ! Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. Glad tidings ! Jesus, the son of Mary, of David, of Abraham, of Adam, is our Saviour ; our prophet ; our priest ; our king. Oh, has not God loved man ?

II.

JESUS THE SEED OF THE WOMAN.

"Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."—MATT. I. 16.

THIS is *the* great event or fact in earth's history ; out of which are unfolded the eternal issues of this globe and its inhabitants. This is the little fountain out of which the greatest of rivers flows.

Reading this verse in connection with the whole chapter, we mark such truths as the following :—

1. *Jesus is the Christ.* In Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the carpenter, himself a carpenter (Mark vi. 3), we see the Christ of God. His name is Jesus, Jehovah the Saviour (or Joshua), because He saves his people from their sins ; and also Christ or Messiah, because He is the anointed One, filled with the Spirit, without measure. The expression, "called Christ," like the words, "thou sayest," means that He *is* what He is *called*,—"the Christ of God,"—the Messiah promised to the Fathers.

2. *He has a human ancestry.* Here we have "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ." His whole ancestry is as thoroughly human as ours can be. Every link of the chain is human ; not angelic, not miraculous. It is a long chain, sometimes almost broken or worn through ; but thus all the more thoroughly human. He is the seed of the woman ; the man Christ Jesus. He is

very man, out of the loins of Abraham, and of the substance of the Virgin ; son of Mary and son of Adam.

3. *He has a Jewish ancestry.* He is of the seed of Abraham. Salvation was to be of the Jews, and He is a Jew ; it was in the seed of Abraham that all nations were to be blessed, and He is a son of Abraham. He took not the nature of angels, but He took the seed of Abraham. Such was God's purpose, and such was the fulfilment of it in Jesus the Christ. The Saviour of the world was to be a Jew, The King of kings now sitting on the throne of heaven is a Jew.

4. *He has a Gentile ancestry.* That is to say, there are Gentiles among his forefathers, such as Rahab the Canaanite, and Ruth the Moabite, and Bathsheba the Hittite. Though, strictly speaking, his ancestry was Jewish, yet Gentiles mingled with it, to shew that all nations were interested in Him, and in his work. Far off and near are connected with this Jesus, who is called Christ. Salvation begins at Jerusalem, but does not end there. "God so loved THE WORLD that He gave his Son." In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

5. *He has a royal ancestry.* He is son of David and Solomon, the last of a long line of kings. He is the root and offspring of David ; the rod from the stem of Jesse, the branch from his roots. All that is regal in a human pedigree is here. In one sense this is but a small thing ; yet it was befitting Him who is King of kings to be thus honoured, and to have his divine prerogatives symbolised by his human.

6. *He has a lowly ancestry.* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not great or mighty men; they are but shepherds, dwelling in tents. So was David a shepherd boy, taken from among the flocks. So was Joseph, and so was Mary,—poor in this world; a carpenter and his wife. There is a singular mixture of the high and low, of the rich and poor. For He is the Saviour of rich and poor. His gospel is equally for both.

7. *He has a holy ancestry.* The line through which He comes is the Church, the election of God, the believing men of Israel. In his pedigree, we have Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Boaz, Jesse, David, Solomon, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah. Thus God has honoured Him; thus He has honoured these holy men; thus He has put honour upon holiness. He is the Holy One; and He comes of holy men and women.

8. *He has an imperfect ancestry.* In two ways is this the case. (1.) Even these holy men from whom he sprang were very imperfect, as we see in the sins of David and Solomon; (2.) Among his ancestors are many open sinners and idolaters, kings of Judah such as Rehoboam, Ahaz, and Jehoiakin, &c., of whom it is said that they did evil in the sight of the Lord. Yes; his genealogy is a very mixed one; but all the more on that account indicative of that which He had come to do, and of those whom He had come to save,—the ungodly, the chief of sinners, the lost, the unrighteous.

9. *He has a mortal ancestry.* These all *died*. Their connection with him did not make them immortal. Whether shepherds, or patriarchs, or kings, or carpenters,

they were mortal. For out of the mortal was to come the immortal ; life out of death ; the everlasting One out of those whose life is a vapour ; the resurrection and the life out of those who were dust and who returned to dust. Thus He is linked with our sin, though He is sinless ; with our curse, though He is the blessed One.

10. *He has an immortal ancestry.* This is only *alluded* to here (in his names *Jesus* and *Christ*), not expressly stated. But as Matthew brings out the human and the mortal, so does John the immortal and the divine. He is the only begotten of the Father, the eternally begotten. Thus the "pedigree of the Lord of the hill," as Bunyan calls it, is eternal. It was "the Word" who was made flesh.

Thus is Jesus in all respects fitted for his mighty work of redeeming. He is very man and very God. He is the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, the son of Mary, yet God over all, blessed for ever. Thus He can bear our sins ; He can sympathise with our sorrows ; He can fight our battles ; He can love as a man, a fellow-man, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.

III.

JESUS THE TROUBLER OF JERUSALEM.

“When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”—MATT. II. 3.

SO quietly had the Son of God stolen into our world, that his arrival was unknown in Jerusalem till these wise men came from the East. Either the Shepherds had not told their tale of the heavenly vision, or they had been unheeded, perhaps ridiculed as fanatics. As the morning star rises without noise ; as the seed shoots up and the flower opens in silence ; so was it with the Christ, the rose of Sharon, the bright and morning star. No thunder woke up the hills of Palestine ; no trumpet-peal went through its cities ; no herald went before him, nor royal salute greeted him.

His mother, and the few of her circle who believed in “the child that was born,” made no proclamation of the heavenly wonder ; they received all in silent happy faith, and pondered the things in their heart, leaving it to God to bring them forth in his own time and way. They did not get excited ; it was too great a thing to excite, and they were too calm and child-like in their faith to be fluttered, or agitated, or elated. They allowed these great things that had happened in their family circle to take their course, assured of their truth and magnitude, and therefore confident that they would ere long grow till

they could not be hidden, but must perforce make themselves known. Such is the confidence which faith has in the great things of God! A man who has got hold of something which is great and true, need not be afraid but that it will spread. Let him hold it fast.

These wise men come with a tale, and a vision, and a miracle. They are not of Israel, though more ready of faith than Israel. They are not from Nazareth, or Bethlehem, or any part of Palestine. Their testimony is independent of Israel's; it is a Gentile testimony; from the land of Israel's enemies. They are recognised as "wise men,"—magi,—Chaldeans, perhaps; or men from the land of Balaam or Job. Men of the East, the seat of all human science; the wise and far-seeing East; the thoughtful and star-gazing East. They come, not with an uncertainty, or an opinion, or a fable, or a vision of the night, but with actual and personal eyesight,—“We have seen”! Yes, it is with “we have seen” that they come,—a word like that of John's, “We beheld his glory,”—“That which our eyes have seen.” They come to Jerusalem! They come seeking Jerusalem's King; as if Jerusalem were to them the centre of hope; as if there were nothing in their own land like what they expected to find in Jerusalem; no king worthy of the name, or to whom they could pay homage, but the King of Jerusalem! This is Gentile faith, fixing its eye upon the star of Jacob.

But Jerusalem has not heard of Him, and is amazed; nay, her king does not know where He is to be born till he has consulted the scribes. The visit and errand of these Eastern Gentiles take Israel by surprise. Nor are

they roused to take any interest in the matter, save, as we shall see, that of being troubled. He was in the world, yet the world knew Him not ; would not recognise Him when pointed out ! He came unto his own, and his own received him not !

This is strange. Had the like happened elsewhere,—in Babylon, or Rome, or Egypt,—it would not have surprised us. Or had these been “troubled,” it would have been natural enough. But it is Jerusalem ! *She* is troubled ! Nay, it is “all Jerusalem.” Troubled at the news of her King’s arrival ! Not excited, or agitated, but “troubled.” Had it been said, “rejoiced,” we could have understood it, but “troubled,”—how strange !

Let us inquire into Jerusalem’s trouble and its causes. The simple visible cause was the statement of the wise men that one had been born King of the Jews. And how this could trouble Jerusalem is not easy to see. For,—

1. *It contained nothing alarming.* It was but of a *babe* that the wise men spoke ; only the birth of a babe,—no more. They did not come to tell that some Eastern King had espoused the cause of this babe, and was on his way, with an army, to secure a throne for him. Their question simply pertained to a babe whom they desired to worship. It was a religious act entirely that they had come to perform. The name they gave the babe, “King of the Jews,” might trouble Herod ; but surely there was nothing to alarm Jerusalem. Herod was a tyrant,—a foreign tyrant, moreover,—only indirectly a Jew ; he might be troubled ; but it ought not to have awakened fear in any Jew, especially in any citizen of the royal city.

2. *It was good news.* A king born to Jerusalem ; this was a good report, even had it afterwards turned out untrue. The people might have said, It is too good news to be true ; but the very mention of it ought to have called forth gladness, not trouble.

3. *It was just what they were expecting.* Messiah, King of Israel, Redeemer of the nation, son of David, heir of David's throne, He was the great national hope ; a hope that had been cherished age after age, and had not died out ; nay, was now more cherished than ever because of present oppression, and because the time foretold was fast running out. Now wise men came from the far East telling them they had seen the star of their new-born King ; now the Gentile came to say that he had heard of the glorious birth. Should they be troubled ? Should they not rejoice ? Should they not say like Jacob, "I have waited for thy salvation," or like Simeon, "Now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." But the announcement that their hope is realised, their great national expectation fulfilled, occasions only trouble !

How is this ? Why are they troubled ? Some might be troubled because the tidings had come upon them in this strange and unlooked for way ; others might be so because they did not know what such tidings foreboded. But the chief trouble, and that of the greatest number, would arise from the *consciousness of their not being prepared*. The tidings would go through Jerusalem,—poor and rich, Priest, Levite, citizen, Scribe and Pharisee,—the Messiah has come ; and then this would awaken

within the immediate question, AM I READY for his coming? For every Jew had, more or less, an idea of Messiah, according to the prophets; so that carnal as many of their notions were, they yet knew He was coming on an errand against evil,—on a righteous mission,—and they could not help asking, in such a case, Am I ready for Him? They knew He was to be great, glorious, just;—could they then meet Him face to face?

Ah, yes, they are troubled, because they are not ready! The news went to their consciences. They might desire his advent on some accounts, but the thoughts of it troubled them because of others. He was to be the messenger of a holy God. He was to be himself a holy one. He was coming to do holy things and speak holy words. This could not but alarm them. Hateful as was the Roman yoke and Herod's tyranny, these were better to them than the sceptre of a holy king.

The news of his coming searched them. It awoke within them thoughts and fears that had lain dormant. They expected Messiah, they wished him to come; but there were so many things connected with his character and reign that made his presence undesirable, that they could not hear of his arrival and not be troubled.

A man's conscience is sometimes more enlightened and better instructed than his mind; and when an appeal is made to it by some solemnising piece of news, it immediately responds. Some sudden stroke of God's hand upon a man, or his family, or his nation, hits his conscience with special force; and conscience asserts her supremacy. As when the Sareptan widow's son was

taken from her, immediately her *conscience* responded with, "O man of God art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" A holy man of God enters a worldly man's house, or the house of an inconsistent Christian, and immediately the man is *uneasy*. His conscience is disturbed. He is troubled as was Jerusalem when the tidings came, He is come!

Yes; Christ came not to send peace, but a sword; and it was the flash of this sword that troubled Jerusalem. There is something in Christ that troubles,—alarms. We know that it shall be so when He comes the second time. They shall look on him and mourn; all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. But his first advent has something about it to trouble, too. It is not *all* peace. Even apart from the glory, and terror, and judgment of his *second*, there is something in the announcement of his *first* that startles the man and rouses the conscience. The very *grace* that is in it is of an awfully solemnising kind; and no man can hear of that grace without feeling that there is something in it from which he must of necessity shrink, unless he is prepared to surrender himself unreservedly and believingly to Him whose grace it is.

He comes as an infant, yet He comes as a King. He comes, offering rest, and forgiveness, and life; yet He, at the same time, makes a claim upon us which none will accept save he whose heart has been touched by the Holy Ghost. He speaks to us in grace, he looks at us in grace; yet in doing so He presents us with a cross which we must bear, with a yoke which we must take on. He announces himself as Jesus the Saviour, yet, in doing

so, He lets us know that He is as a Saviour from sin, a deliverer from this present evil world. Therefore it is that He is not always welcomed; nay, so often rejected. Therefore it is that his presence in love and lowliness troubles the sons of men. They are disarmed,—perhaps attracted, by that love and lowliness; but the demands which these make upon their whole being and life, their allegiance, their obedience, their affection, are such as they will not submit to. So they are troubled, and bid Him depart out of their coasts.

The wise men were not “troubled.” They were eager and earnest in pursuit of Israel’s King. They saw his star in the East, and they made haste to seek Him out. They saw nothing to alarm them, for they were prepared at once to own Him for what He was revealed to be nay, to worship Him. And being thus minded, what had they to fear? “Fear not ye; I know that ye seek Jesus.” Being prepared to take Him, at any cost, they had nothing to shrink from. For it is only they who are not disposed to admit his entire claims that can be troubled at the announcement of his advent,—either his first or his second. Take Him for what He is; take Him for what He contains and offers; take Him for what the Father testifies of Him,—take Him entire, and you have nothing to fear.

It seems strange to say, and yet it is true, that Christ comes to *trouble* us,—“Be *troubled* ye careless ones.” Woe to those who have never been troubled by Him; into whose hearts or consciences He has never looked with his solemn eye, as in that day when He troubled Jeru-

salem. Elijah of old was counted the troubler of Israel, so is Christ the troubler of the world.

He will not let men alone. He is ever and anon announcing himself, coming into the midst of them, now here and now there, and troubling them. He came to Corinth, and it was troubled. He came to Thessalonica, to Philippi, to Derbe, to Lystra, and they were "troubled." He did not come with fire, or sword, or sweeping judgment, yet they were "troubled." Wherever He comes, He troubles. He came to Germany in the 16th century, to Switzerland, to Scotland, to England, and they were troubled. He comes to a town, a city, a village, or a family, and they are "troubled." He comes to a soul lying asleep or dead, and it is "troubled."

What is at the bottom of all the persecutions of various ages? It is Christ troubling the world. If He would let it alone, it would let Him alone. What means the outcry, and alarm, and misrepresentation, and anger, in days of revival? It is Christ troubling the world. What means the resistance to a fully preached gospel? It is Christ troubling the world. A fettered gospel, a circuitous gospel, a conditional gospel,—a gospel that does not truly represent Christ,—troubles no man; for in such cases it is another Christ that is announced, and not the Christ, the King of the Jews, that troubled Jerusalem. But a large, free, happy, unconditional gospel, that fully represents Jesus and his grace, Jesus and his completeness, does trouble men. It troubles all to whom it comes, in some measure. Some it troubles and then converts; some it only troubles. But its announcement does, more or

less, for all who hear it, what it did for Jerusalem in the days of Herod,—it troubles.

The world's only hope is to be "troubled" by Christ. If He let it alone, all is over. Christ's errand just now is to trouble men,—to awaken them,—to call them to repentance. And the more fully He is preached, the more are men troubled. Has a preached Christ ever troubled you? Has the thought of his coming near you troubled you more? And have you found that the only quieter of such alarms is receiving Him as King and Saviour?

But Christ troubles the churches. As He did to Jerusalem, so does He often to his churches. He troubled Ephesus with, "Thou hast left thy first love." He troubled Sardis with, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." He troubled Laodicea with, "Thou art neither cold nor hot." So does He oftentimes trouble his backsliding churches. He speaks, He comes, He acts; and they are alarmed. They feel they are not ready to meet Him. They are troubled.

Yet all this troubling is in love. He sounds his trumpet to awake the sleepers. He comes to us *in grace* as he came to Jerusalem. Why should we be troubled? We need not, if we be willing to receive Him and to worship Him. He does not wish to terrify or to repel. His desire is to attract: to get entrance for Himself into our hearts. Of course, if the world be there, and you are unwilling to part with it, his coming will trouble you, his knock will alarm you. If your idols refuse to be displaced, if another king reigns within and is resolved to

keep his throne, the coming of Messiah must be the cause of unmingled trouble. It cannot be otherwise; for He demands your whole man complete and without reserve. But if, through grace, you are weary of your present occupants, and would fain be dispossessed of the world and Satan, then here is the Christ, the Son of God, —He wants to come into your city, your house, your heart. Give Him free welcome and glad entrance. Let Him come in and sup with you. Let his grace constrain you to willing obedience. He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.

The Christ has come! The angels announced Him, the shepherds sought Him, the wise men worshipped Him. Unto us a child is born! O gläd tidings of great joy! Tidings not meant to terrify or overwhelm, but to gladden and to comfort.

And we can add to this, the Christ has died! Nay, He has risen! Ah! this is not sorrow, this is joy. It is the silver trumpet sounding out love,—the love of God; not the iron trumpet, breathing vengeance in its blast. O men of earth, sons of Adam, hear the proclamation. Seek his face and live. Deal with Him in simple trust; He waits to deal with you in free and boundless love.

IV.

THE DESERT VOICE.

“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees : therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”—MATT. III. 10.

THIS is the voice of one crying in the wilderness ; the voice of a second Elijah ; the man of the desert ; the burning and shining light ; the forerunner of Messiah ; the prophet of warning. He spoke to Israel ; he speaks to us.

It is the voice of warning ; a trumpet voice ; prelude to the last trumpet ; herald of coming wrath and woe. It spoke first to Israel ; it speaks to the church ; it speaks to Christendom ; it speaks to the world ; it speaks to each of us.

I. *The axe.* This is judgment ; destruction. The axe is not for planting, or pruning, or dressing, or propping, or protecting, but for cutting down. It is spoken of as used for trees (Deut. xx. 19) ; for the carved work of the temple (Ps. lxiv. 6) ; for towers (Ezek. xxvi. 9) ; for a whole forest (Jer. lxvi. 22, 23) ; for a battle-axe (Jer. li. 20). In all cases for *overthrow*, utter overthrow. The axe against Israel was the Roman host, and many such axes has God wielded, age after age. Every judgment is an *axe* ; pestilence is God's axe ; famine God's axe ; adversity God's axe. At Christ's second coming will be the uplifting of

the axe against antichrist, against Christendom, against every false church. There is a great difference between the axe and the pruning knife. Yet some of God's judgments are both in one. An axe to the ungodly ; a pruning knife to the saint. It is God's axe, not man's ; its edge is sharp ; it is heavy ; it will do its work well.

II. *The forest.* He is speaking, not of a tree, but *trees* ; a forest. He is likening Israel to a forest. It may be an olive-wood or a palm-wood, the oaks of Bashan or the cedars of Lebanon. Israel is the forest, God's forest, planted by God, on God's own hills and valleys. So also is the church ; and each member is a tree in that forest. On that forest God has his eye ; from its trees God comes seeking fruit. From the forest of Lebanon trees were once cut down for the temple ; but this is for destruction, not for building nor ornament.

III. *The warning.* The axe lies at the root of these trees. He who placed it there placed it for a *warning*. He saw his trees not prospering, not growing, not bearing fruit, and He resolved to proceed against them. He cannot tolerate *fruitlessness*, for which there is no excuse. But He is *patient* ; so He contents himself simply with *laying down* the axe, leaving it to speak its own lesson, to tell its own tale, a tale of coming judgment, which yet may be averted by fruitfulness. It is laid down and left to lie ; not *cast* down, as if hastily or at random. It is laid down at the *root*, for it is not against leaves or branches, but against the *root* that the vengeance is to be directed.

IV. *The execution.* The axe lies idle for a time, its sharp edge glittering in the sun. But it is to be lifted up.

The forest is to be *cut down*, not stripped as by the hurricane, nor blasted as by lightning, but cut down at the very root ; laid upon the ground ; no longer its waving branches and leaves making a goodly show, but "cut down," separated from that soil out of which it was extracting no fruitfulness. "Cut it down" is the command ! Why does it *pretend* to be a fruitful tree with its leaves and branches ? Cut it down ; why does it thus impose upon the eye ? why cumbereth it the ground ?

V. *The doom.* Cast into the fire. Not left to wither, but cast out to be consumed. It cumbered the ground when living ; it must not do so when dead. Let it be burned ! Nothing for it but the fire. Its end is to be burned. And the fire is everlasting ; it shall not be quenched ; and yet the tree shall never be consumed. Awful doom. Never quenched, never consumed ! Its smoke rising up for ever and ever. No possibility of restoration ! No hope of this tree (as in that of which Job speaks, xiv. 7) ; no water to make it bud again. Nothing but the ever-consuming fire.

VI. *The cause.* Unfruitfulness in good. Not extreme wickedness, but simple unfruitfulness in good ! How searching this announcement. O ye that count on heaven because you have done no harm, look here. If you have done no good, borne no good fruit, that is enough ! And the sentence is as *sweeping* as it is searching, for it is "*every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit.*" No exception, no sparing, "They shall not escape."

This, then, is the process that is now going on ; this is the nature of the present dispensation. If it were to be

depicted by emblem, it would be an axe lying at the root of a tree !

Christ, at his first coming, laid the axe there ; at his second coming He will lift it up and smite ! The axe was laid down when Israel least thought of such a thing ; when they were boasting of privilege, and calling themselves children of Abraham ; so it shall be lifted up to smite, when men are saying "peace and safety ;" boasting of progress and reform, and deliverance from the bigotry of narrow-minded men.

Now is the age of trial, of probation. Israel's forest was found barren, and was cut down. Now Christendom is on its trial. Shall it be cut down ? It has been long spared. Is it fruitful ? *Thou*, O man, art on thy trial ? What is to be the issue when the Lord comes ?

V.

JESUS IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON.

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, among the people."—MATT. IV. 23.

IT is Christ himself that comes before us here; Christ in his life and doings here below; Christ as the God-man, the sent of God, the revealer of the Father; Christ as the sinner's friend and helper. By looking at Him as He was on earth, we learn what He is now in heaven; our faith gets a soil in which to root itself; a foundation on which to rest. We see Him on earth full of grace and truth; in heaven the same; just such an one as a sinner can approach, and trust, and love; just such an one as possesses all that a sinner needs. Mark these three things here (1.) Jesus the teacher; (2.) Jesus the preacher; (3.) Jesus the healer.

I. *Jesus the Teacher.* He is the great giver of instruction to the sons of men; for He is the word and the wisdom; He is the lesson as well as the teacher. "Who teacheth like Him" who says, "Learn of me." They who come to Him He calls "disciples,"—men who enter his school, and come to Him for instruction. As such He receives them and deals with them; for He has "compassion on the ignorant." Not in one thing, but in all things does He teach. He teaches the inner man, for He has access to the spirits of men. He speaks to ear,

and heart, and conscience. There is no teaching like his for completeness, for efficacy, and for the moulding of the whole man. He speaks, and we hear. We speak, and He hears. He comes to us; we go to Him. And in this blessed interchange between the scholar and the Master, the great work of enlightenment, renovation, expansion, consolation takes place. Of all teachers, He is the wisest and most learned, as well as the most patient, loving, and painstaking. He openeth our ears to hear and our eyes to see. As He did in Galilee in the days of his flesh, so does He now over all the earth, though at the Father's right hand.

II. *The Preacher.* That is, He is the herald, the proclaimer of news from God. He is specially noted here as the herald of one thing, that is, "the gospel of the kingdom,"—the good news about the kingdom. What had He to proclaim in this respect?

(1.) *That there was a kingdom.* Not merely a state of blessedness or safety; not merely pardon and salvation; but a kingdom; with all its royalty, and glory, and grandeur. "There is a kingdom" is his message.

(2.) *That the gate of this kingdom is open.* Once closed, now thrown wide open; once fenced with the flaming sword, now unguarded and unfenced.

(3.) *That this gate has been thrown open by God.* It has not been man that has accomplished it: God has done it, with his own hand and power,—and all in love.

(4.) *That God has thrown it open in righteousness.* It has not been forced open, nor merely opened because of importunity or pity, but righteously. Righteousness closed it,

righteousness has opened it. Righteous entrance for unrighteous men ! This was his message ; this is ours.

(5.) *That the entrance is free.* No payment of any kind. The poorest, neediest, unfittest, most unqualified may enter at once. It is for such ! Not for the good, but for the bad !

(6.) *That it is nigh.* The kingdom of God has come nigh unto you, was his message. Its gate is at our gate. There is but a step from the one to the other.

These were glad tidings ! And they came from Him who knew them well ; who knew the kingdom ; who had a right to speak of it ; for He was its King. He has come to earth seeking to fill that kingdom of his ; to obtain kings for it ; fellow-kings along with himself. This is our proclamation still. A kingdom ! A kingdom ! Heavenly, holy, glorious, blessed ! An open gate ! Messengers sent out to entreat and compel men to come in ! Oh enter in ! Oh become kings ; heirs of a throne !

III. *Jesus the healer.* He has come to an hospital, a city of the plague, a world where all are sick and dying ; both in soul and body. Heavenly skill is his ; nay, divine. Medicine is his ; love to the sick is in his heart, and the balm of Gilead in his hand. He healed "all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people." He did so in fulfilment of his divine errand. He did so to manifest his divine fulness and skill. He did so to shew his power and willingness to heal worse diseases. He did so to attract and invite the spiritually sick,—the blind, the deaf, the lame, the leprous, the palsied,—all that are sick, whatever the nature of their disease. He is

the great healer still ! And we come to Him for health. He is the tree of life, both in leaf and fruit. He beckons us to his shade and healing. Wilt thou be made whole ? is his question to each. He wants to be made use of by us. He entreats as a favour that we employ Him as our physician, and that we apply for his medicines. We need not specify them,—indeed, we cannot,—He knows what they are, as He knows what our sickness is. There is not one sick soul here that He is unwilling to heal. Oh, apply ;—apply at once !

VI.

HIS SUN.

“*He maketh his sun to rise.*”—MATT. V. 45.

HERE is the true link between God and “nature” (as men call it), and between us and nature. Here is the divine claim to proprietorship, to lordship over “nature.” All things are God’s. No created thing is the proprietor of itself or of any other created thing. There is but one proprietor, one universal proprietor, one to whom all things belong in a way in which they cannot belong to any other, one whose proprietorship cannot be dissolved or sold; for it is an everlasting proprietorship resulting from the great truth that God is God, and that no creature is or can be God. He who says, “All souls are mine” (Ezek. xviii. 4), says also, All things are mine. Creaturehood is divine property. Hence the shepherd comes seeking his own lost *property* (Luke xv. 4); the woman searches for her lost *property* (Luke xv. 8). Heaven and earth are God’s property; the Sun is “his sun”; far more *his* than *ours*. For,

(1.) *He made it.* May He not then claim it as his own? Is not creatorship the basis of the truest proprietorship? Yes, He made the sun. Is it not then *his*? Is not every ray of it,—morn, and noon, and eve,—all his?

(2.) *He kindled it.* It would appear that it was not lighted up, or at least for our earth, till the fourth day.

Then He who made it, kindled it, and bade it shine for us. Is it not *his* sun? He commanded it to shine, and it shone.

(3.) *He keeps it burning.* It is not allowed to burn low or to go out. He supplies it with all that is needful, and says to it, Burn on, burn on. He leads it up each morning, and over the arch of noon, and down into the west. All this rising and setting, this daily shining and shading, this coming and departing, are his. It is *his* sun emphatically. Were it not for Him it would go out in obscure darkness.

(4.) *He makes it do his work.* It has done his work in ages past; it has shone in past generations, and is shining still. The same sun that shone on Adam, and Noah, and Abraham, and Paul,—nay, and on Jesus the Christ of God,—shines on us, doing its work for us. Yes; the same sun in Europe as in Asia, in Palestine as in Scotland!

Let us see how it does God's work; how it has been doing this, and is doing so still. In this work we notice, mercy, miracle, type, judgment.

I. *Mercy.* Yes; God set his sun in the heaven for mercy; He makes it to arise on the evil and the good, to speak of his free love, and lead men to repentance.

(1.) *It enlightens.* What a world without the light of the sun. Herein is love.

(2.) *It heals.* There is health in the sunbeam as well as in the fresh air. The sun's rays are healing. Light is medicine.

(3.) *It gladdens.* Sunshine is joy. It gladdens all

earth, poor and rich. It diffuses joy over hill and dale ; in the hall and the chamber, in the hut and the palace.

(4.) *It fructifies.* It makes all living things to grow and bring forth fruit. No sunshine, no life ; no growth, no fruit. For man and beast, for herb and tree, for flower and leaf, sunshine brings growth and fruitfulness. Such is God's love in sunshine. Ah, yes, it is *his* sun ! It does his work.

II. *Miracle.* It has been associated with miracle in past ages. We call to mind Joshua, Egypt, Hezekiah, the Crucifixion-darkness. God has used it for miracle ; for the display of his power. He kindles or quenches, He sends it on its course, or arrests it, or makes it turn backward, all according to his pleasure. That sun is to us the memorial of the mighty power of God,—his miracle-working hand. By it, and in it, He doeth wonders (Ps. xix. 4, 6). Praise Him then ye sun and moon, praise Him all ye stars of light (Ps. cxlviii. 3).

III. *Type.* God has made use of his sun and its light for types in many ways. It is the type of the inner light ; of Him who is the light of the world, of the Sun of righteousness. It does God's work in serving as a type for such things as these. Let it thus do his work to us, and for us each day that it shines. Type of the true light, the the light of heaven, the light of the soul, the light of Christ, how glorious art thou, O Sun !

IV. *Judgment.* It spoke of judgment to Egypt when for three days it was blotted out. It spake of judgment to Judea and to earth, when for three hours it was shrouded, when Jesus was dying. But it specially is connected with

judgment in the book of Revelation. It became black as sackcloth of hair (vi. 12); the third part was smitten (viii. 12); the fourth angel's vial was poured out on the sun, and it had power to scorch men with fire (xvi. 8); an angel stood in the sun to summon all beasts and fowls to the great banquet of slaughtered kings and captains. These are some of the ways in which God has connected *his* sun with judgment.

Yes, it is *his* sun. Jesus has taught us the expression; let us not lose it. That little word means much.

It is *his* sun; then is it also *ours*; ours because his; made by him for *us*.

His sun; then it speaks to us of Him. It is a bright and golden link between Him and us.

His sun; then let us enjoy it as such; for it shines not by chance or by mere laws of nature. He who made it bids us enjoy it.

His sun; then let us learn his love; his love even in its radiance, much more in that light of which it is the type.

His sun; then let us love as He loves, and shine as He shines. Let us love the unthankful and the evil, doing good to all; and liking to bless and gladden all.

His sun; then it is Himself whom we behold; it is *He* who shines. We say, "it rains," as if chance or nothing were the author of the rain. So we speak too of sunlight; forgetting that it is God himself that is shining in every ray.

VII.

HUMAN LEPROSY AND ITS DIVINE CURE.

"When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."—MATT. VIII. 1-3.

THE Lord ends speaking and begins working; He comes down from the pulpit and enters the hospital. Such is his whole life: words and deeds intermingled; *words* of health and *deeds* of health. His lips breathe fragrance, and in his hand is the balm of Gilead.

Crowds follow him; but it is with one only that we have here to do. Let us mark, (1.) the leper; (2.) his healer.

I. *The leper.* He is one of the vast multitude; but there is a difference between him and them. They flock to and follow Jesus; but not as men full of wants; only to see and hear some new or curious things. But there is one exception,—the leper; one whose whole head was sick and heart faint; one who not merely needs Christ, but *knows* that he needs Him.

(1.) *He comes.* All are needy in some way or other; he only so feels his need as to step out from the crowd and draw more closely to the Lord. It is his need, his disease that prompts and brings him. So is it still. Crowds following Jesus, only a few dealing personally with him. Yet what else will do?

(2.) *He worships.* He kneels before the Lord. What he has heard has given him high thoughts of Christ. Surely He is the Son of God, the Christ of God. It is with high thoughts of Him that we must come; poor thoughts of ourselves.

(3.) *He pleads.* He has something to say, and he says it briefly and well. It is with no laboured or set speech that he comes. He tells his need, and utters his thoughts of Christ: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He knows that He *can*; and he casts himself upon his sovereign will for the exercise of this power in his case. The "if" is not so much an expression of doubt as to his *willingness* as an appeal to his *will*. It is not unbelief but faith that speaks the "if." He wants to be made clean, and He casts himself on Christ for this. He is the hyssop, the water, the blood, the ashes, the priest, the physician, all in one. Thus we still come, doubting neither the willingness nor the power, yet casting ourselves on the *will* of the Lord; not presuming to dictate, yet appealing to his sovereign grace. As the needy, the sick, the unclean, we come; for the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

II. *The Healer.* He is Jesus of Nazareth; the physician of Gilead, with the balm in his hand; He who tells us, "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick"; who asks, "Wilt thou be made whole?" He carries with him all the health and the skill of heaven. He was known as such when here; He is known as such still. The healer of the world!

(1.) *He put forth his hand.* He does not shrink from

nearness to the leper ; he is not afraid of infection. He invites approach ; and in token of his sympathy and kindness, He puts forth his hand. That hand *now* wields the golden sceptre ; it is the nail-pierced hand ; and it is still put forth. It contains as much of health, and power, and blessing, as when he was here.

(2.) *He touched him.* Not nearness merely, but touch ; the one might indicate the willingness, the other brings the cure itself. It is contact with the Healer that we need ; nothing short of this ! We touch him, He touches us ! This is all. A touch draws out the heavenly electricity, and pervades us with its divine energy.

(3.) *He spoke.* Voice and hand go together. "I will, be thou clean." He lets him know that the *will* in him is no obstacle. The leper suspected that the sovereignty might be a barrier. Jesus removes the fear. No. My will is not the hindrance. *Ye* will not ; not *I* will not. This was never found an obstacle when Jesus was here ; nor is it so now. To each coming one his language is still, "I will, be thou clean." *Our* will is the hindrance, not *his*.

(a) *It is the voice of love.* He pities the leper, and hastens to let him know this. He has compassion on him, and does not keep him in suspense. He has no pleasure in delays.

(b) *It is the voice of authority.* It reminds us of Genesis i. 2, 3. He speaks as one who knew that he could cure. Not hesitatingly. Nor are the words a prayer, but a command. He speaks, and it is done.

(c) *It is the voice of power.* He has the power to carry his authority into effect. He speaks, and it is done.

He said once, "Let there be light, and there was light." He speaks now, "Be whole," and the leprosy is cleansed. Thus love, authority, and power are all conjoined. It is the voice of Omnipotence.

He is the same Christ still; with the same love, and authority, and power. He is still the Healer, and the worst of diseases fly from his touch and voice. Let us go to Him with all that afflicts us. He can and He will heal us of all.

It is hard to persuade men that this is really the case; that the Son of God has to do with lepers still; that he is the physician for the worst of diseases; and that as He asks no reward for the cure, so He asks no preparation nor qualification in the diseased one. With our whole leprosy we come; He takes our case in hand; He touches and heals. There is no case of evil too hard for Him; no human leprosy too incurable for His skill; no human leper so repulsive as to make Him shrink back. Jordan did not flee from the touch of the Syrian leper, but bade him welcome when he came to its waters; so Jesus turns not away from the most loathsome specimen of diseased humanity that ever presented itself to His gaze or touch.

He wants to heal! Wilt thou not, O man, give Him the opportunity which He seeks of healing thee? The whole head may be sick, and the whole heart faint. But what of that? Is He not able to heal to the uttermost? Be persuaded to present thyself to Him, just as thou art. Give this divine Healer thy simple confidence. Take Him for what He is, and He will

take thee for what thou art. Thus shalt thou meet in love ; thou to be healed, and He to heal ; thou to have the joy of being healed, and He to have the joy of healing thee, and to anounce to heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, that another leper has been healed !

VIII.

MAN'S DISLIKE AND DREAD OF CHRIST.

"Anà, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."—

MATT. VIII. 34.

I SCARCELY know a verse of Scripture where there is such a melancholy contrast between the beginning and the close. The first part is so hopeful, the second so disastrous. The first seems to lift us to heaven, the second to cast us down to hell. The whole city flocks to Jesus; but its multitudes have scarcely reached him when they ask Him to quit their coasts; not their city merely, but their region; as if the farther off the better. They do not turn their back on Him, but worse: they ask Him to turn his back on them. Yet the scene was not an uncommon one in our Lord's history. It was much the same as in the synagogue of Nazareth; and in Capernaum after the miracle of the loaves (John vi. 24 . . . 66); and afterwards at Jerusalem when one day they shouted "hosannah," the next, "crucify." Alas, that it should be still the same in our own day!

Let us mark,—

I. *The coming.* "The whole city came out to meet Jesus." Not *some*,—not the city,—but the whole city! It was a universal movement; and a most interesting one. A whole city flocking out to meet Jesus! Surely this

would make angels glad. It was one of the most marvellous and blessed sights that had been seen. Ah, how seldom had such a thing been seen, or is seen now! They had heard that He had done a miracle, that He had cast out devils, and they flocked to Him. The report of those who kept the swine had moved the city! A swineherd's tale had made all the city turn out to meet Him! O wondrous spectacle!

II. *The seeing.* It would appear that Jesus was on his way to their city; so they soon met Him,—saw Him,—heard Him. They did not remain afar off, but came nigh. So that their feelings towards Him, and treatment of Him, were not founded on mere report. They heard what others had to say; but they also saw for themselves. And it is this seeing that so aggravates their guilt. What they did and said, they said and did in the full knowledge of what He was.

III. *The refusing.* They besought Him to depart out of their coasts. An awful request, in many ways. They had sick among them, did they not want them to be healed? They had others, perhaps, possessed with devils, did they not want them to be delivered? The sick beseeching the physician not to visit them! The famished city entreating the benevolent store-keeper not to bring them bread! The thirsty traveller filling up the one well in the desert! The shipwrecked sailors requesting the life-boat to keep away from them! Was there ever a request so sad, so fatal? Why was this? There was something in Jesus that drew them; but there was more that they disliked. What they heard about the

devils and the swine made them afraid. If He came, He would drive out their herds of swine; He would not spare their sins. They would like Him as the physician of the body, but not of the soul. His company seemed dangerous and terrible. The destruction of that herd of swine was his doing, no doubt; and He who could send the devils into the swine could send them into themselves. It was terrible to be near one who had such power over spirits. So they besought Him to depart. And it would appear that He departed. He took ship immediately, and sailed to the other side; and as they saw Him departing, and the white sail vanishing out of sight, they would be relieved as by the retreat of some fearful enemy. The departure of the Son of God was matter of mutual congratulation to these Gadarenes! The scene is a fearful one; the lessons most impressive. Their "depart from us" is a foreboding of his "depart from me" (Matt. xxv. 41).

(1.) *How near salvation they were.* It was on its way to them. It would soon have entered their gates. They were going to meet it, and it was coming to meet them. How blessed! Was salvation ever nearer! It seemed now as if nothing could hinder their being blest. Yet it passed away; and they were the cause. They would not have it. Thus near is salvation to us every hour; yet we put it away. "I would," and "ye would not" are still the words of awful truth. Nay, they themselves at first seemed bent on having it; a whole city bent on being saved,—rushing in one multitude to the Saviour! But it turned out to be not the kind of salvation which they

wanted ; and He not the kind of Saviour they cared for. So they would have none of Him ! Thus *we* neglect the great salvation though so near, and despise the Saviour though coming to meet us ; nay, standing at our side !

(2.) *How they wronged the Saviour.* "They were taken with great fear" (Luke viii. 37). What had He done to alarm them or to create distrust ? He had healed their sick, cast out devils, restored the lunatic to his right mind ; ought these to have raised hard thoughts of Him ? Especially, should not the sight of Him have proved attractive ? Yet it was when they saw Him that they besought Him to depart. Or was the destruction of their swine enough to outweigh these miracles of mercy ? Yes ; He smote their covetousness, and reproved them for their unlawful gains. And this they could not bear. But how grievously did they wrong Him in this, putting false constructions on His works of mercy and of righteousness. They wronged his love, his interest in their welfare, his desire to break the power of hell among them. Do we not thus wrong Him constantly ? Is not all unbelief a wronging of Christ, a repetition of the sin of the Gadarenes, and with less excuse than theirs ?

(3.) *How they wronged themselves.* When beseeching Him to depart out of their coasts, they were sending away their one friend and physician, quenching their one light. The word "besought" implies that he was bent on remaining ; and they desisted not in their entreaties till they had constrained Him to depart. O awful impotency of sin and unbelief ! And is not this still the attitude of unbelief ? Does it not say, Depart from me ?

Is not its meaning just,—O Jesus I beseech thee do not convert me ; do not save me, do not cast out Satan,—let me alone,—what have I to do with thee or thou with me ? And Jesus yields at length. He sails away ; and with Him all heaven ; with Him salvation, and life, and joy.

IX.

THE REST AND THE REST-GIVER.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—MATT. XI. 28.

I. *THE Speaker here is the Son of God.* It is not man speaking to man and sympathising with man, but it is God himself coming up to us and uttering his divine compassion. He sees our case. He knows exactly what we need. He is *able* to bless us to the full. It is not *helpless* love giving vent to kind but unavailing sympathy; it is the love, the pity, the tenderness of *Omnipotence*. It is *heaven* that is pouring out its compassionate yearnings over *earth*, and stretching down to it the helping hand of power. It is the great Creator drawing near to his alienated but sorrowful creature, and presenting him with rest. After the great work of Creation God "rested"; he invites his weary creatures to share his rest. Rest *in* me and rest *with* me is his gracious message. It takes *omnipotence* to give rest to the weary sinner.

II. *The persons spoken to are the inhabitants of Galilee.* That region was reputed the worst in the land; yet it was to them that the Son of God spoke. The crowd that he was speaking to was composed of the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum,—the worst in Galilee. They were compared with Tyre and Sidon,

Sodom and Gomorrha, and declared worse than these by our Lord himself. They had more advantages than others. They were the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done. They were the least deserving of favour of all the inhabitants of the land ; the most deserving of *wrath*.

III. *The character under which they are spoken to is that of toiling, burdened ones.* “All ye that labour and are heavy laden.” They were *sinner*s; but that was not all; they were sinners “toiling” and “borne down with heavy burdens.” The word “labour” is frequently used to denote the toiling process itself (Luke v. 5), or the result of it in *weariness*, as when it is said, “Jesus being *wearied* with his journey,” sat down, thus wearied, to rest by the well (John iv. 6). The “burdens” are such as those with which the Pharisees loaded their followers (Luke xi. 46). It is no particular kind of labour or burden that is meant here ; but *any* labour, *any* burden whatsoever. It may be worldly toil, and vexation, and disappointment ; it may be the wretchedness, and weariness, and soreness of spirit which sin brings after it ; it may be the feeling of those who are asking, Who will shew us any good?—what matters it? It is human wretchedness and weariness from whatever cause,—human thirst, human hunger, the emptiness of an aching heart that would fain be happy, but knows not how or where to find happiness. They who are spoken to are spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. The words then are very wide, wide as the wide earth. They are broad and full. They are unconditional and universal. They mean every one. They take in every weary son of

Adam. The question is not, "Is your labour of the right kind?" or, "is your weariness a true and spiritual weariness?" but, "are you a weary sinner?" And who is not? Though indeed some are more weary than others.

But now let us mark the substance of the Lord's invitation, as thus given out to the worst and most weary of the sons of men. That which is promised here is *rest*. This rest is for the *weary*. This rest is a *gift*. This gift is *from Christ*. This gift is obtained by *going to this Christ*.

(1.) *Here is rest*. It is what *God* calls rest; and therefore must be truly such. It is what man needs; and without which he must drag on a weary sorrowful life. You need rest, O man! Here it is for you. Never did you need it more than in this restless, noisy, bustling, pleasure-loving age. Do not reject it. Rest for the weary! This is our message.

(2.) *This rest is a gift*. It cannot be bought with money, nor found by search, nor obtained by travel. It is a *gift*. *Free* rest! This is our gospel. Rest to all who need it. Rest to any one who will take it. O free gift of rest, how art thou despised by the sons of men! They are weary, and would buy rest at any price; but they will not take it free!

(3.) *This rest is Christ's gift*. "I will give you rest." I will refresh you. I will be as the dew unto Israel, refreshing and reviving, after the heat of the day. From the hand of Christ alone it comes. He brought it with him from heaven, and he gives it to us. It is blood-bought rest. It is love-given rest. Jesus stands with this precious blessing in his hand; or rather He goes up to

every weary child of Adam and offers him rest,—his own rest,—the rest of the Father and the Son.

(4.) *This rest is for the weary.* Simply for those who need it! For all Christ's gifts are suitable. I am the resting-place, He says; weary sinner, sit down here; sit down, just because you are weary. As the thirsty man drinks because he is thirsty, and the hungry eats because he is hungry, so the weary rest, *because they are weary!* How near is rest to us! How simple is God's way of giving it!

(5.) *This rest is got by coming to Christ.* It is only from Him that we can get it; and there must be a direct dealing with Him concerning it. The knowledge of Him is *rest!* His words are *rest!* His cross is *rest!* All we know concerning him is *rest!* We try other resting-places; let us try this. We go to others; let us go to Him. Let us transact with Him. It is the weary that He welcomes! It is with the weary that He delights to share his blessed rest! Go to Him for rest, O weary one! He will not deny it.

He invites. Come unto me! Is not that enough? Do you need further warrant?

He beckons. It is as if he were stretching out his hands,—beckoning you to draw near!

He beseeches. His are earnest words, and He himself is in earnest, thoroughly in earnest. He *entreats* you to take his rest; as if rest were no rest to Him till you shared it.

He commands. The words before us are *imperative.* *He commands* you to come. You cannot lose this rest, but by deliberately disobeying his command! Could rest be brought nearer than this?

X.

THE THREE EXCHANGES.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."—MATTHEW XI. 29.

THE previous verse contains the Lord's promise of *rest*; free, large, immediate, universal. The present verse is added to shew the way in which He carries out that promise.

Three things are implied as producing the *unrest* of man: the kind of yoke, the kind of burden, and the kind of teaching. He has had a *yoke* of a most galling kind, a *burden* intolerably heavy, and *teaching* which has made these unspeakably worse. From these three sources of weariness the Lord proposes to deliver. Not simply by loosing the yoke, and removing the burden, and condemning the false teaching, but by substituting others in their place; a yoke of his own, a burden of his own, teaching of his own.

The figure of the "yoke" is taken from the agricultural apparatus fastened round the neck and shoulders of the animals used in ploughing, which, in the east, is very cumbersome and painful, subjecting them to great restraint, bending them down, and preventing their eating, as well as their free motion, in any direction. Eastern harness is both clumsy and cruel. In Lev. xxvi. 13 it is

used for the bondage of Egypt, "I have broken the band of your yoke, and made you to go upright." In Deut. xxviii. 48 we have reference to the Roman yoke, "He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck." Other allusions of this kind are frequent, and we may notice that God, in speaking of his love to Israel, says, "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat before them." In the passage before us we may take the "yoke" as referring to the yoke of sin, and the yoke of the Pharisees, which was more grievous to the spirit and conscience than the yoke of Egypt, or Assyria, or Rome, was to the body or the outward estate.

The word "burden" refers sometimes to the load upon a "beast of burden," and sometimes to the freight of a ship, or the weight upon the shoulders of a carrier. See Isa. xlv. 1 where the innumerable idols of Babylon are predicted as being carried off by the conqueror: "Their idols were upon the beasts and upon the cattle; your carriages were heavy laden, they are a burden to the weary beast." It was with heavier burdens that the Pharisees loaded the shoulders of their followers (Matt. xxiii. 4, Luke ii. 46).

The expression, "Learn of me," may mean either "take me for your teacher," or "take me for your copy or model." In both these senses the teaching of the Pharisees was fitted only to produce unrest.

Such then are the three sources of a sinner's unrest. Our Lord offers to abolish them. Yet not simply to abolish them, but to give something in exchange, far more blessed. He has a substitute or exchange for each of

these respectively,—a substitute which will not merely remove the unrest arising from these three causes, but will give in exchange three corresponding things fitted to impart rest at each of the points whence formerly the unrest had proceeded.

I. *The exchange of yokes.* “Take my yoke upon you.” As if He said I too have a yoke, but very different from that which has hitherto galled your shoulders ; here it is at your side ; take it ; put it on ; it is easy and pleasant ; thus you shall find rest for your souls. Yokes are for the purpose of constraining the unwilling and resisting animal to submit to its owner’s will, and do its master’s work. Christ’s yoke is certainly for the purpose of fitting us for doing his will and work ; but then it does this by making us thoroughly willing, by making the service pleasant, by removing everything that galls or wounds. It is an “easy yoke,” so easy that it makes the work easy and delightful ; we would not part with this yoke ; it is pleasant to bear, and the work is pleasant to do. We may understand it thus. The yoke is that which He *says* to us or bids us do ; it is also the *way* in which He says this, so tender and gracious, it is the *spirit* He infuses, the spirit of love and liberty. It is the yoke of forgiveness and peace. Did not he lay this yoke upon the sinning woman when He said, “Neither do I condemn thee ; go, and sin no more.” Did He not lay it on Zaccheus when He said, “Come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house.” Did He not lay it on his disciples when first He said, Follow me, and when afterwards He said, “As the Father hast loved me, so have I loved you ; continue ye in my love.” It is not the yoke

of bondage, or gloom, or penance, or uncertainty, or terror, but the yoke of the "new commandment," which springs from his love to us, and leads us to love and serve in return. Thus we get a new Master, we enter on a new service, with new and blessed laws, of which the beginning and the end is love. Hear Him saying, "Take my yoke upon you ; for my yoke is easy."

II. *The exchange of burdens.* "My burden is light." Your present burden is hard and heavy, it weighs you down, it makes you faint under it ; you are like Israel under the burdens of Egypt. Let me take that off, and give you one of my own in exchange. You will find the difference. Mine is light ; it not only does not press you down, but it raises you up, it makes you lighter and more buoyant than before. This "burden" is his whole service or the things which he calls us to do or suffer for Him. For in taking his yoke we do not become idlers. We work. But all our work for Him is gladness ; every new piece of work *raises* instead of *depressing* us. Such is the power of his love shed abroad in our hearts, the love that casts out fear, the love that passeth knowledge.

III. *The exchange of teaching.* "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly *in heart* ;" not in word or outward demeanour like the Pharisee, but in heart. Take me for your teacher ; take me for your model ; learn of one who will not be angry at your ignorance and stupidity ; imitate one who will shew you what it is to be lowly. Learn of me, He says to you. All other teaching is unrest ; this is rest and peace. It is the teaching of love ; it speaks of love ; it offers love ; it exhibits love ; the love of Father,

Son, and Holy Ghost. The reception of this teacher and his teaching is liberty, is rest, is deliverance, is gladness. It is this which heals the soul, which binds up all its wounds, which dispels all its clouds.

O man, let Jesus teach you. Give up your intellect, your heart, your whole soul to his teaching. He knows *what* to teach and *how* to teach. His teaching is rest ! Of no other teaching can this be said ; all besides this is unrest and weariness. Of this only it is not true, that increasing knowledge increaseth sorrow.

XI.

NINEVEH AND HER TESTIMONY.

"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."—MATT. XII. 41.

IT is sometimes good to compare the present with the past; to mark the likeness or contrast; the progress or the regress. We may thus get a warning, or an encouragement, or a stimulus. Let the past speak to the present. The day is coming when the present shall speak to the future. Each day, each year, each age, has a voice to its successor, nay, to all its successors.

Our Lord here interprets the past. He bids it speak to the present. He bids the present listen. He re-animates past scenes; he gives life to the dead. Out of their graves He calls up a voice. Let us hear their message to Israel, and their message to us.

I. *Nineveh and its sin.* It is of a heathen city that He speaks. He does not overlook heathenism or heathendom. It is a city wholly given to idolatry; immersed in pleasure; elated by its greatness; ambitious of universal dominion; a city of palaces and temples; a city of chariots and horses; a city of princes and warriors; a city of pomp and splendour; a city that knows not Jehovah, that scorns his people, and abhors his city and his land. The cup of its guilt was deep and full (Nahum iii. 1-19.) Its character resembles that of our cities. Its sins are

ours. Pride, fulness of bread, love of pleasure, intoxication, covetousness, vanity, lust, gaiety,—these mark us as they did the men of Nineveh. Our sins are multiplying. Our cup is fast filling.

II. *Nineveh and its repentance.* It was a heathen city, yet it repented ; a proud and lofty city, yet it repented,—king and people. It had no knowledge nor wisdom, yet it repented. Jonah was its *first* prophet, yet it repented. One sermon did the work. One trumpet-blast shook the city. It was not a word of terror, yet they repented like the jailor at the earthquake. It was (1) immediate repentance. (2) It was true. (3) It was deep. (4.) It was universal. (5) It was acceptable. Was the like ever heard ! Noah preached one hundred and twenty years in vain, yet Nineveh repented in a day. Two angels went to Sodom in vain, yet Nineveh repented under one sermon of one prophet ; and that a very feeble and inconsistent one. How marvellous that such a city should have repented under such a prophet ! How marvellous that God should have so honoured such a prophet. How sovereign He is in his dealings ; how unlike us in his counsels ; how unsearchable in his ways. God speaks to us, to our cities, to our villages, and says, Repent ! Yet we repent not ! With bibles and ministers bringing before us the heavenly messages all our lives, we repent not ! O hearts of stone ! Harder than the rock !

III. *Nineveh and its testimony.* That city has two testimonies.

(1.) *A past testimony.* It speaks to us, and says, Repent. Its sackcloth says, Repent ! Its fasting says, Re-

pent! Its cry for mercy says, Repent! Are we better? Do we need no repentance? Has Nineveh's repentance no voice for us?

(2.) *A future testimony.* Its inhabitants shall rise against us in the day of judgment. Its testimony is not over. It spoke to Israel; it speaks to us; and it shall yet speak to both again in the awful day of recompense. Nineveh will condemn Israel and us; if we repent not verily we shall be inexcusable. In the presence of the men of Nineveh we shall not be able to utter a word of excuse or extenuation. For we have a greater than Jonas for our prophet,—the Son of God himself. We have Moses, and a greater than Moses; we have Elijah, and a greater than Elijah. Yes; Jesus speaks to us; He spoke on earth; he speaks from heaven! He says, Repent! He makes our land re-echo with Repent! He makes our churches resound with the same voice, Repent. He speaks down through all the ages; he speaks *now*, and says to us, Repent!

The day approaches, when the men of Nineveh shall rise up against the men of Israel, and when the men of Israel shall rise up against the men of Scotland. That rising up shall be for condemnation! The greater the light rejected, the greater the condemnation incurred. Men of the nineteenth century, look back three thousand years, and see Nineveh on her knees in sackcloth before God, broken down under one sermon of one prophet! Is not that a sight to break you down and make you cry for mercy, while the Lord tarries, and ere the last trumpet sounds. Oh seek the Lord while He may be found!

XII.

THE TWO SOWERS.

"But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."—MATT. XIII. 25.

THERE are two sowers in this parable, yet but one field ; two kinds of seed, yet but one field. The one field is this world, called in verse 41, "his kingdom ;" the sowers are the Son of man and the devil ; the two seeds are the wheat and the tares. The field belongs to the Son of man ; the enemy had no part in its proprietorship ; he does his mischief by stealth and cunning ; he climbs over the wall in the night while men sleep. He is the enemy of the Son of man ; and his desire is twofold, (1) to choke the good seed, and (2) to fill the field with tares. He is the same enemy that stole into Paradise, and wrought ruin there. The parable exhibits him as full of (1) enmity, (2) cunning, (3) determination, (4) patience, (5) confidence. All these we find brought out in this simple and apparently very useless expression, "he went his way," or "left the place"—ἀπῆλθεν. Why did he thus go his way ?

I. *He did not wish to be seen.* He came by night, and he went by night. He came while men slept, and he went ere they awoke. He did not wish it to be known that he was there. He did not care for the fame of doing the thing ; all he cared for was, *that it should be done.* How different from us ! We care more about the honour of

doing a thing than the work itself. How single-eyed is Satan in his evil ! He does his work unknown. He steals quietly *to* his work and *from* his work, without sound of trumpet. Besides, he does not want to excite men's fears, or to alarm the servants of the Master by his visible presence. That would defeat his object. Ah, it is with an *invisible* devil that we have to do ; mighty, but unseen ; the ruler of the darkness of this world,—himself loving the darkness,—dwelling and working in it. Surely we need to *watch*, whether in keeping our own vineyard or that of others.

II. *He had done his work.* It might be on a greater or a larger scale, that mattered not. He had done his work. It did not require repetition or re-sowing. The sower had done all that, as a sower, he could do. Sowing is not a process repeated daily ; it is done once ; he did not come night after night to sow and re-sow. He needed but one sowing-time ; and so he went his way.

III. *He had confidence in the seed.* He knew of what kind it was, its vitality ; its indestructibility. It could lie long in the ground before it sprung. It would not fail. It was the true seed of hell. It was sure to spring, sooner or later. So he went his way. Ah, what confidence does this exhibit in the vigour and vitality of error. Have we like confidence in the life and power of truth ? Do we speak it as those who trust it ?

IV. *He had confidence in the soil.* The soil had not been meant for error, but the curse was on it, and its fruitfulness had become fruitfulness in evil. In a cursed soil, his seed was sure to be nourished and grow. The

seed was evil, and the soil was evil. No one knew these things better than this enemy, this sower of the tares. It was then, with confidence in the soil, that, having done his work, he went his way. The soil would not fail him ; it would do its work.

V. *He had confidence in the atmosphere.* He is the prince of the power of the air ; the ruler of the darkness of this world. It is on the air as much as on the soil that the harvest depends. He knows the peculiar elements with which this atmosphere is filled ; how it is charged with all that fosters evil ; how it will nourish the tares, so that they shall grow without fail, even though the wheat should die. And, accordingly, having done his work, he goes his way ; he trusts to the evil air and the evil seed suiting each other.

VI. *He had other work to do.* He is not omnipresent nor omniscient. He goes up and down in the earth, walking to and fro in it, doing his work here and there. He does not abide in one place ; he goes about to do work elsewhere ; he visits place after place in succession ; he never folds his hands nor shuts his eyes ; he knows no night, and he needs no slumber. Incessant work, all round and round the globe ; in every kingdom, in every church, in every soul. He has always something on hand ; some new error ; some new departure from the faith ; some new snare ; some new vanity ; some new delusion to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect ! Sometimes the prince of darkness, sometimes the angel of light ; always the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air.

His first seed sown was in the ear and heart of our first parents, and what fruit of evil has it borne, what tares has it produced ! Since that, he has been sowing constantly the tare-producing seed. So will he continue to do till the Lord comes to bind him.

Oh, what an enemy have we to fight with ! What strength, what subtlety, what wiles, what perseverance ! How he works ! How he sows ! Error upon error ; a little seed at first, yet producing a vast harvest of error and sin ; a race of evil-doers, evil-thinkers, evil-speakers, perverters of the truth, enemies of God ; fields of tares ;—so like the wheat, that man cannot discern the difference.

Resist the devil, work against him, for we are not ignorant of his devices.

XIII.

HEROD'S BALL-ROOM.

"But when Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod."—MATT. XIV. 6.

THIS birth-day ball of Herod was held, in all likelihood, at Machaerus, a fortress beyond Jordan, not far from the Dead Sea. It was a high and royal festival. Pomp, splendour, luxury, and lust were all gathered there. In the midst of the song, and the glitter, and the mirth, there was one troubled conscience, that of Herod,—one trembling man, Herod. His soul was ill at ease, though surrounded with all that the world could give to banish care. He, Herodias, and John the Baptist, may be said to be the chief personages brought before us in this scene. But let us take up the narrative in another form ; (1.) before the ball ; (2.) during the ball ; (3.) after the ball.

I. *Before the ball.* The news of Christ's miracles had overspread the land, and reached Herod. He was startled and troubled. Who is this Jesus ! Can he be John ? Can John be risen ? But why these fears on the part of Herod ? The answer carries us back to the time before the ball. John had reproved Herod for his wickedness, more than a year and a half before ; for Herod had taken his brother's wife, and John had proclaimed the unlawfulness of the deed. This had roused the king's anger. He would fain have slain him, and was only kept from

doing so by fear of the multitude, who revered John. But he imprisoned him, and kept him in the castle of Machaerus for eighteen months. The guilt of an unlawful marriage was on his conscience, as well as the guilt of imprisoning a holy man. His course of sin had been begun and persevered in. He was braving out his crimes ; and like worldly men in such circumstances, he rushes into gaiety to drown his troubles and terrors. The pleasures of the feast and the ball-room, the song and the dance,—these are welcomed to induce forgetfulness, and “minister to a mind diseased.” In how many cases do men fly to the ball, the theatre, the card-table, the tavern, the riotous party, not simply for pleasure’s sake, and to “taste life’s glad moments,” but to drown care, to smother conscience, to efface convictions, to laugh away the impressions of the last sermon, to soothe an uneasy mind, to relieve the burden or pluck out the sting of conscious guilt ! O slaughter-houses of souls ! O shambles, reeking with blood ! O “lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries” ; how long shall men “run on in this excess of riot” ? O lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life, when will ye cease to intoxicate, and lead men captive at your will ? O God-forgetting gaiety ! O dazzling worldliness ! O glittering halls of midnight, where

. . . “Youth and pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet,”

when, when will ye cease to be resorted to by the sons of men to “heal the hurt” of the human soul, to still its

throb and heartache, and to medicate the immedicable wound ? *

II. *During the ball.* It is a gay scene. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life are there. All that can minister to these are there. Herod is there, feeding on lust, drinking in pleasure, stupifying conscience. The fair daughter is there, in all the splendour of gay wantonness. And the vile mother is there, lascivious and revengeful. And the courtiers are there, in pomp and glitter. Music and mirth are there. The dance and the song are there. No note of gloom, no indication of trouble. What a scene of mirth and revelry ! But some are absent,—conspicuously absent, we may say. John is not there. A prison holds him. His disciples are not there. They can but weep and lament. And Jesus is not there, nor his disciples. They were at the marriage festival in Cana ; but this ball-room is not for them. It is not the place for a follower, either of Jesus or of John. The beauty of “this world” is one thing, and the beauty of “the world to come” is quite another. These scenes of royal vanity are instructive ; for they pre-

* “Væ tibi flumen moris humani ! Quis resistit tibi ? Quam diu non siccaberis ? Quousque volves Evæ filios in mare magnum et formidolosum, quod vix transeunt qui signum conscenderint.”—*Augustine, Conf.* B. I. c. xvi.

“Woe to thee, O river of human custom ! Who resists thee ? When shalt thou be dried up ? How long wilt thou toss the sons of Eve upon a vast and terrible ocean, which even they who have gone up into the cross (as their vessel) can hardly navigate ?” Would that these solemn words were sounded over our land, and through our churches, in these days of approved, and licensed, and (shall I say) *consecrated* worldliness ?

sent the world in its most fascinating aspects. All that regal state, and princely beauty, and wealth, and gold, and silver, and gems, and tapestry, and blazing lamps can do, to make this world fair, is in such scenes and haunts. These balls are the most seductive specimens of pure worldliness that can be found. Surely the god of this world knows how to enchant both ear and eye. In an assembly like this, the natural man is at home. Here the unregenerate heart gets scope to the full. It is a place where God is not ; where the cross is not ; where such things as sin and holiness must not be named. It is a hall where the knee is not bent, except in the voluptuous waltz ; where the music whose burden is the praise of Jesus is unheard ; where the book of God, and the name of God would be out of place ; where you may speak of Jupiter, or Venus, or Apollo, but not of Jesus ; where you may sing of human love, but not of the love that passeth knowledge ; where you may celebrate creature-beauty, but not the beauty of Him who is fairer than the children of men. It was during that ball that the murder of John was plotted and consummated ("Lust hard by hate."—*Milton*) ; that a drunken, lustful king, urged on by two women, perpetrated that foul deed. Such are the haunts of pleasure ! Such are the masquerades of time. Lust is let loose ; revenge rises up ; murder rages ; conscience is smothered ; the floor of the ball-room is spotted with blood ; the dancers may slip their feet in it, but the dance goes on. Such was the *coarse worldliness* of old days ; but is the *refined worldliness* of modern times less fatal to the soul ? The ball is finished, and John lies dead in prison. What a picture of

gaiety ! What a specimen of ball-room revelry ! And this is pleasure ! This is the world's joy ! "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God ?"

III. *After the ball.* Of the chief actors in this ball-room murder, nothing more is said. They pass to the judgment-seat, there to receive sentence for lust, rage, revenge, and murder. They have sent John before them to the presence of his Judge to receive his reward. They have got their revenge, and they leave his body to be dealt with in any way. His lips are silenced ; that is all they care for. But his disciples find their way into the prison ; they gather round their Master's body ; they bury it in silence. They can do no more. That ball has robbed them of their master. It has been a costly festival to them ! Then they go and tell Jesus, knowing his sympathies, and feeling that they have no one else to whom they can unbosom themselves so confidingly. Jesus hears of the murder, and is silent ! Not a word escapes him. He had come to suffer both in himself and in his members ; so he is dumb. This is the day of silent endurance and patient suffering. The day of recompense is coming.

O gaieties of earth ! Feasts, and revellings, and banquetings, how often have ye slain both body and soul ! Men call you innocent amusements, harmless pleasures ; but can ye be harmless, can ye be innocent, when ye steal away the soul from God, when ye nurse the worst lusts of humanity, when ye smother conscience, when ye shut out Jesus, when the floors on which your votaries dance off their immortal longings, are red with the blood of souls !

XIV.

MANS' WAYS AND GOD'S WAYS.

“And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.”—
MATT. XIV. 15, 16.

THE scene of this great gathering was the desert of Bethsaida, the open and uninhabited region on the north-east of the Sea of Galilee, and evidently close upon the sea, so that Jesus, when He *fed* the multitude, did not need to create water for them, and also when He was done feeding them, he could at once despatch his disciples by a boat.

The *time* is toward evening. All the day Jesus had been teaching and healing. The afternoon drew on; the sun was getting low; the people were weary and hungry; some of them far from home. There was still time enough to provide a repast for them before sending them for it would be about three o'clock, but still the day was far spent.

The *persons* in this transaction may be arranged into three classes,—the multitude, the disciples, the Lord himself. As for the multitude, they are merely presented to us (1) as the objects of his compassion; (2) as the objects of his bounty. They come to hear and to be fed; to give

Jesus an opportunity of shewing his love and fulness ; they come not to minister, but to be ministered to, by the Lord. As for the disciples, they were of little service here. The Lord would have used them, but they would not be used. They shew coldness, not compassion ; littleness and narrowness, not generosity. It is the Lord himself who is shewn here, in solitary and unapproachable love and pity.

But it is with the *mode* or *manner* of blessing that we have specially to do here. It is this that brings out the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and draws us to him as the great provider for our wants, the great feeder of soul and body ; and as is the Son, so is the Father ; and he that has thus seen and known the Son, hath seen and known the Father.

This mode of blessing will be best seen by contrasting the disciples with the Master, their proposal for supply with his.

Before he does anything himself, he goes to them, for we read in John (vi. 5.) that the first thing was his question to Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat"? Thus He gives *them* the opportunity of providing, before He undertakes it himself. This only draws out their emptiness and inability to do anything in the matter ; for the whole twelve now come to Him upon the subject, and it is their proposal that meets us first in this scene, "Send them away, that they may go and buy." It did not occur to them to appeal to the Master and his bounty. They were slow of heart to believe. Had it been a blind man brought for cure, they would have done

this. But the feeding of five thousand was such an enormous miracle, that they never thought of this ; and, besides, they had not yet exhausted human help, they were not yet at an extremity, for there were villages a few miles off. They do not apply to Him till they can do no better ; He is the last, not the first, to whom they go.

Their remedy is quite characteristic, quite like man : “*send them away that they may buy.*” But this brings out the Lord and his mode of meeting human wants all the more wonderfully. “*They need not depart ; give ye them to eat.*” Such is the contrast between the disciples and the Lord, between man and God, between the heart, the thoughts, the ways of man, and those of God. “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord.*” Man’s way of relieving man is, “*Send them away that they may buy.*” God’s way is, “*They need not depart ; give ye them to eat.*” And this, too, is our way of relieving ourselves ; we would *go and buy*, instead of at once, and on the spot, *taking the blessing* at the hands of Jesus.

Let us mark then the way in which Christ relieves, in which God deals with us, as the God of grace. The supply He gives is—

(1) *Immediate.* It is given upon the spot ; it comes to us just as we are, hungry and weary. It does not keep us waiting ; it does not send us away to be fed. It is put into our hands, our lips, at once.

(2.) *Free.* We need no money ; all is without price. God is the great giver ; we are but receivers. We are only blessed when we learn this. God has respect simply

to our *wants*, not to our qualifications or our means of purchase. He does often indeed make use of others to impart his bounty, "give ye them"; but whether directly or through a medium, all is free. The water that flows to us through the river's channels, is quite as free as that which descends in showers.

(3.) *Suitable*. He gives the very thing we need. His eye sees our want, and He supplies it exactly. We are sure that what we get from Him will be suitable.

(4.) *Abundant*. He giveth liberally. His stores are plentiful. It does not matter what the greatness of our need may be, or the number of the needy, He has enough, and He pours out liberally. He fills us; there is enough, and to spare.

(5.) *From his own hand*. Sometimes more directly than others, but still the supply comes from himself. Take it as either from the Father or the Son, it matters not. It is the Divine hand stretched out to give. We get all from himself, from his fulness, from his love. It is with Him we are to deal, and in dealing let us *trust*, let our transactions be ever those of simple child-like confidence.

XV.

THE HELPLESS ONE AND THE HELPER.

"But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—MATT. XIV. 24-31.

FAITH'S home is in the future; so is her heritage. At present she has nothing but God himself to live upon,—to feed upon; all else is within the veil. It will come in due season; but meanwhile the only real thing is God. Him she knows, she trusts, she walks with, she converses with. But from the visible she is disengaged, and dwells in the invisible,—present and future. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Thus we live by faith.

Yet though thus living by faith, in another atmosphere, and above the level of things seen, we cannot help being affected by matter, and time, and motion, and change, and pain, and death, and fear, and hunger, and thirst, and the

various conditions of the body. Sometimes there is brightness, sometimes there is dimness; sometimes we are lifted up and expanded, sometimes we are depressed and straitened. We are too like a revolving beacon-light, with its alternate flash and gloom. Sometimes a word of Scripture warms and brightens wonderfully; sometimes it seems cold and dark. Sometimes we are brave and fervent, ready to confront any danger or trial, because of the peace within; sometimes we turn pale, and shrink from sorrow or peril; so variable is our pulse; so uncertain our spirits; so feeble our spiritual health; so sickly our spiritual frame.

It was night upon a stormy sea. The boat was but a fisherman's, unfit to weather wind and wave. The night-blast was right against them. They toiled, but made little progress.

The night wears on. Watch after watch passes by. It is now the fourth; the last, just before the dawn; still dark. In the darkness, a form is dimly seen, the outline of a human figure in the gloom. What is it? Who is it? Is it from beneath or from above? Is it material or spiritual? The disciples are in terror; Peter, no doubt, among the rest.

But it is not with the disciples that the narrative has chiefly to do; it is with Peter,—or rather with Peter and the Lord. These two stand out before us here, inviting our attention. Or we might say, we have first the disciples and the storm; then the disciples are lost sight of, and we see only Peter and the Lord; then Peter disappears, and we behold no one “save Jesus only.”

I. *Christ's words of cheer.* He saw their terror, and He

knew its cause. The storm and the darkness had alarmed them ; but more than these, the figure in the distance. It might be a spirit from beneath let loose upon them ; it might be the prince of the power of the air,—the ruler of the world's darkness,—coming to increase their danger, to accomplish their destruction. Christ corrects their thoughts, and in so doing removes their fears. His words of cheer are brief, but full of power. In our translation they are *ten* ; in the original only *five*. “Be of good cheer : it is I ; be not afraid.” The first of these clauses is but one word, and it is the key-note of the passage. “Be of good cheer,” or simply, “Courage” ! “Be not cast down or troubled.” Right through the darkness, and over the storm, came this cheering word. But it was not the mere word that thus sounded, it was the well-known voice, the tones of which they would at once recognise. And then it was followed up with the “It is I” ;—which is again followed up with “be not afraid,”—“dismiss all your fears.” The special cheer of these words was, however, the “It is I,” and without this all the rest would have been vain. It is the announcement of his presence that was the specially cheering thing ; it would have been enough even had he not (in his love and anxiety to relieve their fears) added, “Be of good cheer : be not afraid.” What was the storm to Him ? What was it to them, if He were with them ? What were night, and storm, and darkness, with all their perils, if HE were there ? They needed no more to comfort them than “It is I.” It told them of power and love more than sufficient to meet all danger, and to deliver from all evil.

II. *Peter's response.* "If it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water." The other disciples were silent. Their fears were quieted, and that sufficed. But Peter must have more. He must have the Master with him; nay, he must run to meet Him, even on the water. There does not seem to be any *use* in Peter's going to meet his Master. The request was prompted simply by affection, and a desire to be where He was. It looks very like one of Peter's hasty utterances,—“It is good to be here;” “Shall we smite with the sword?” But still it is faith that is working. The desire to go was, no doubt, affection, but the feeling which overlooked all the difficulties of the way,—the impossibility of walking on the water,—was faith. So boundless was his confidence in his Master's power and love. A word, he knew, would be enough! Oh for Peter's faith in Jesus;—even in little things;—things which seem to have no large object in view, but merely the exhibition of affection towards him! Here is faith that could remove mountains! Faith that can do miracles,—that makes light of impossibilities! Peter saw Jesus only; darkness and storm were nothing! There might be the desire to get out of this sinking vessel, which had for hours been buffeting with the wind; and the feeling that *with Jesus* he was safer on the bare water than in the ship without Him. In Peter's estimation, security was only at the side of Jesus! Anywhere, anywhere with Him; in the fiery furnace, or in the raging sea. Is this our estimate of Jesus, and of all things, or places, or perils in connection with Him? Safety with Him; but nowhere else, even in the stateliest vessel or the strongest fort.

The *form* of Peter's request is remarkable, "bid," or "command" me to come to thee on the water; not "permit." In a case like this, mere permission would not do. Had it been the highway or the mountain side, permission would have been enough. But it was the sea. To venture there, he must have a command; and in obeying that command, he could count upon omnipotence being placed at his disposal. Jesus commands; shall not all the elements and powers of nature unite in ministering to the fulfilment of the command?

There is here, also, the contrast between the Peter of yesterday and the Peter of to-day; fitfulness both in faith and feeling. One day it is "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" another it is "Lord, bid me come to thee." One day he forsakes his Master; another he casts himself into the sea to get at Him, as he stood on the shore. Yet fitful as these were, impulsive as Peter was, all his fitfulness and impulsiveness centred in Jesus. The many currents of his wayward being,—sometimes rushing right forward, sometimes going backward, sometimes eddying round,—yet all took their motion from Jesus, and their direction from something connected with Him. It might be difficult, at times, to analyse or understand Peter's feelings; but various as they were in their upper or their underflow, this was still uppermost, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

III. *Christ's response to Peter.* "Come"! One word; no more. It was all that Peter wanted; and he got it. The request was a bold and a great one; but it was

granted at once. It was a request made without any previous promise or warrant; yet there was no reluctance nor delay. Peter knew to whom he was speaking. He had seen Him do miracles for others,—strangers,—why not for himself, a disciple? * Thus he casts himself upon the Master, and the Master at once responded. He honoured his disciple's confidence. How comfortably must that word "come" have sounded in the midst of the darkness! It was so gracious; and it was so exact an answer; an answer to an apparently *useless* request. The requests for healing and the like were all for some needful purpose; and we the less wonder at the Master's grace in granting them. But this seems so useless,—the mere utterance of warm impulse,—that we are struck with the marvellous grace of the Master, who, instead of keeping silence, or rebuking his hasty disciple, grants his request for a miracle,—a stupendous miracle,—and bids him "come." This is singular condescension, and fitted in many ways to rebuke as well as remove our unworthy suspicions of the Lord. He who so graciously responded to his disciple's request for a *needless* miracle, will not deny us when petitioning for what is *needful*. With what power should the promise come to us, "Ask, and ye shall receive"; and what an illustration is this of the text, "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he heareth us."

IV. *Peter's venture*. He came down out of the ship, and walked on the water. I call it *venture*; and yet it

* The Lord did hardly any miracles either for himself or his disciples.

was not venture, for that implies hazard, whereas here there was no risk. It was rather leaving a leaking, sinking boat to go on board a noble ship. Still to human eyes, though not to angels', it was a venture. Frail as the vessel was, it was to human eyes safer than the sea. Out of this vessel he lets himself down into that raging sea, and began his walk. He was now wholly in the arms of Jesus; nothing between him and the waves but these everlasting arms. What his feelings were in letting go his hold of the ship we do not know; perhaps very peculiar; but with that word "come" sounding over the waves, why should he fear? His was the venture of faith; a faith which shewed itself, not in its power to *grasp* but to *let go* the vessel's side,—the human stay. Yes, we often speak of faith as *taking hold*; but here it is seen in *letting go*.

And is not this oftentimes the very point of the difficulty we experience in believing? We cling to the visible, the palpable prop,—the human rope which we hold in our hand,—unwilling to let go. We speak of our inability to believe; but what is this save *our tenacity in holding on to the very things which God asks us to quit*? We say that we "cannot lay hold"; should we not rather say that we "cannot let go"? We complain that we have *no power to cling* and *grasp*; whereas it should be that we have *no will to let go*. How much power is needed to let go a rope or to drop into the sea? Never let us forget the thought of Peter quitting the vessel and dropping into the sea; but let us treasure it as one of the best exhibitions of true faith. How many, though they hear the Master's voice saying, "Come," linger in the vessel, cling to it, look over its

sides, as if resolved to drop down, and then shrink back into it, afraid to venture from the visible into the invisible, from that which sense and touch can feel, to that which we know nothing of, save by the bare word of God.

V. *Peter's failure.* He had bravely dropped into the sea, and was walking along ; but he soon began to be alarmed. The wind did not lull ; it blew as violently as ever. His fears awoke, and his faith shook. He began to sink ; and in his terror cried out, "Lord, save me." The visible and sensible had reassumed their power ; and under their evil influence, faith gave way ; the things unseen vanished ; the power and presence of Christ seemed now as nothing when compared with the power and presence of the storm. Peter was, in fact, trying to resume his hold of the things he had let go ; he was clutching or groping after the visible. Thus unbelief was regaining its power. His eye at first saw nothing but Jesus, now it sees the raging billows. His ear at first heard nothing but the Master's "Come" ; now it hears the roar of the blast. It was thus that the evil heart of unbelief was re-displaying itself ; the storm was coming between him and Christ ; terror came in, and he began to sink. Jesus was for the moment lost sight of, and Peter was in despair. The Master had granted his request ; had bid him come ; and now he knew not what to do ; perhaps he repented his petition, and wished he had never left the vessel. But thus Jesus shews His disciple his weakness, and takes this opportunity for magnifying his own power. What is Peter now, and where, if Jesus do not help ? He is like a withered olive-leaf tossed upon the foam.

Without Jesus he sinks, he perishes. But though faith has given way, Jesus still remains ; and even in spite of unbelief he succours and saves.

VI. *Christ's deliverance and rebuke.* It is not, like man, first rebuke and then deliverance ; but first deliverance and then rebuke. How like Him who came, in love, to bless the unloveable, to save the lost, to bring nigh those that were afar off ! How like the good Shepherd, bent only on laying hold of his strayed one ! How like Him who spoke the parable of the prodigal son, and who in it has shewn us how God receives back the very worst of his lost ones, without upbraiding, or coldness, or delay !

(1.) *Jesus stretched forth his hand immediately.* Instantaneous deliverance ! He would not have the *fears* of his disciple last a moment. He succours at once. In that outstretched hand the marks of the nails were not yet to be seen. These were still to come. But the love was there ; the power was there ; the security was there. In our day we have the same outstretched hand ; only the prints of the nails, the marks of love are now there. The outstretched and the pierced hand are one ! To his sinking Peters he stretches the pierced hand. To each sinking, perishing son of Adam, he does the same. Take hold, O man, take hold !

(2.) *Jesus caught him.* Nothing is said of Peter's laying hold of Jesus ; it is Jesus laying hold of Peter that we have here. Jesus caught him ; whether by the hand or not, we are not told ; nor does it matter. "Jesus caught him," that is enough. How like this to the apostle's words, "apprehended of Christ" ! What now are winds

and waves? What matters it whether the boat is at hand or not? Rage on ye winds! Rise up ye waters! Darken the heavens ye clouds! Jesus has caught him,—Jesus holds him, is not that sufficient? O man, sinking in the world's stormy sea, let Jesus *lay hold* of you, as he is most willing to do, and all is well! For what is all salvation but Jesus seizing hold of the sinner! "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

(3.) *Jesus spoke to him.* Hitherto he had heard but his own voice, "Lord save me"; now he hears the Master's voice responding. His own cry could not allay his fears; but the words of Jesus do this at once. His first word is rebuke (for it is but one word in the Greek), "O thou of little faith"; or as it should simply be, "O little-faith!" This is all. He does not dwell on this, nor continue his upbraiding. What gentleness and tenderness are here! O little-faith! Might he not say to us, "O no-faith"? And then he adds, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" or, "For what purpose dost thou doubt?" "What is the use of thy doubting?" Perhaps the words involve such questions as these: (1.) Whence comes this doubting? (2.) What means this doubting? (3.) Of what service will this doubting be?

Thus speaks Jesus still, "It is I, be not afraid." By his tones and words, no less than by his gestures (his stretching out of the hand), he cheers us, he beckons us, he comforts us. Wherefore then do we doubt? What reason have we for so doing? Why not fling all distrust away?

Such is the attitude of Jesus to his church in her darkest

and stormiest nights. He comes to her on the water. He places himself near. He waits to succour. O church of God, accept the proffered hand, and listen to the gracious voice.

Such is his attitude towards our world. "All the day long (and all the night long too) have I stretched out my hands." Yes ; he stretches out his hands. O sinking world dost thou not heed his hands and his voice? Dost thou not welcome his interposition? Or wilt thou reject Him utterly?

XVI.

THE GRACIOUS WELCOME.

"Bring him hither to me."—MATT. XVII. 17.

1. *WHOSE words are these?* They are Christ's own. They are authoritative words. He *commands*. He has just come down from the transfiguration hill, and what a contrast between that mountain glory and this vale of tears and disease; but he returns to his old work of healing and blessing, just as before. The glory has not changed Him. And so with Him now in the midst of that glory. It has not altered his love. He is the same Saviour still; as ready to receive sinners as in the days of his flesh.

2. *To whom are they spoken.* To his unbelieving disciples. Their faith was small indeed, and they are rebuked for it; they are called a "faithless and perverse generation." Yet He does not, on their account, repel the poor possessed lunatic, nay, He makes them the instrument of bringing the sick man nigh. How easily can the love and power of Jesus break through all barriers, and find their way to the sinner through a wall of unbelief!

3. *Concerning whom are they spoken?* A poor lunatic, possessed with a devil. It is one of the worst cases that has come before Him, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." But best or worst, what matters it

to Him who created the heavens and the earth ; who is Lord of principalities and powers ; master of Satan and his angels ; who has the keys of hell and death. Others had failed ; He *could* not fail. In this confidence He speaks. The worst case is nothing to Him.

4. *What do they teach us ?* Much indeed. (1.) Something as to Christ ; (2.) Something as to ourselves.

(1.) *Something as to Christ.* He is the great healer ; the sinner's one physician. His words are health. His touch is health. His look is health. Nay, his very garments are health ; for as many as touch either Him or them are made perfectly whole. Leprosy, lunacy, fever, blindness, death, possession by Satan, are nothing to Him. In Him all fulness dwells ; and that fulness is dispensed by love. There was much here to quench that love, much to repel Him, but He will not be repelled, and his love cannot be quenched, even by the waters of unbelief. He is "mighty to save"—"able to save to the uttermost." Omnipotence is in his touch, his look, his word. Let us do justice to his fulness and his grace, lest He have to say of us, O faithless and perverse generation.

(2.) *Something as to ourselves..* He comes looking for faith, but finds only unbelief ; looking for child-like simplicity, and He finds only perversity. Yet He invites us still. He invites us to come ourselves, and He invites us to bring others. What He desires is personal contact with Himself. In one sense distance is nothing to Him, but in another it is. He wants to have us near Him. For He speaks and acts as very man. And, besides, what-

ever might be His power to heal or to pardon at a distance, He knows that nearness to Him is our blessedness. Contact with Him is health, and life, and warmth. Creeds, doctrines, truths, words, are all good in their way, but they are not the living Jesus, nor can they be substitutes for Him and for His love. But into this close contact He invites us to bring others, "Bring him hither to me." He does not say, "Come," neither does He say, "I will go to him;" He says, "Bring him." And was any "brought one" ever sent away? Each coming one gets the blessing, and each brought one too. In the present case this is the more remarkable, because there was little faith (if any) in any of the parties concerned. Yet Jesus *must* warn and bless, not for our sake, but for His own. In spite of sin and unbelief and perversity He must bless!

Such is the Christ with whom we have to do, full of grace and truth. Let us draw near; let us keep near; let us allow Him to pour out His love on us; let us bring others to Him to be partakers of the same overflowing love.

XVII.

THE PEERAGE OF THE KINGDOM.

“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”—MATT. XVIII. 1-4.

IT was for a kingdom that Israel was looking; a heavenly kingdom. In spite of many low views, they believed in “the kingdom of *heaven*”; “the kingdom of God”; and in “the kingdom of Messiah,” as the same with these. Being persuaded of their Master’s Messiahship, his disciples wanted to know from him something about his kingdom. They took for granted that it was theirs; that they were sure of entrance; and they wished him to tell them who was to have the highest place in it. They were *too* sure of getting in. Alas, how many now are not sure at all.

Let us mark (1) the question, (2) the answer. In that question we find something right and something wrong. Let us look at it; and then see how exactly the answer meets it.

I. *The question.* Who is the greatest in the kingdom? Besides the belief in a coming kingdom, there was an appreciation of its glories and honours. It was not wrong to wish for the kingdom; nor to desire a high

place in it. We ought to "press forward;" for if it is worth our while to get in at all, it is as much so to get a high place; for all that God gives is to be earnestly sought after by us; we cannot be too greedy of these. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." This was right; but the wrong thing was the spirit and the way in which the question was put.

(1.) It shewed *ignorance*. They had forgotten the words spoken to Nicodemus, "except a man be born again," &c. They were going too fast, and overlooking the question of *entrance*. They were deficient in their knowledge of the kingdom, and of the way of entrance, and of the *principles on which honours were bestowed*.

(2.) It shewed *pride*. It was a self-sufficient question; indicating high thoughts of themselves and of their own title to its privileges. "We are the people."

(3.) It shewed *selfishness*. Here was earthly ambition working its way into heavenly things; a spirit of selfish rivalry, each one wanting to get above his fellow,—to push up to the highest seat and room.

II. *The answer*. It goes to the very root of the matter; it deals first of all with the question which they were overlooking, viz., of *entrance*. Thus it rebukes, it warns, it instructs; answering not merely the one question put, but many others along with it. When man puts a question to God, he does not see the whole bearings of it. When God answers, he takes up all these, and does not answer a fool according to his folly, but lovingly condescends to take up the whole case from the beginning. The Lord here answers partly in a similitude and partly in words.

He takes an infant, and holding it up, he asks, how is this babe to get in? They believed that babes belonged to the kingdom; He had told them that "of such was the kingdom of heaven." Well, how did they get in? Had they said or done any good? None. They get in as mere nothings; as those who have no good word or deed to recommend them. Our Lord's two cases of entrance are, the thief on the cross,—a man who had done nothing but evil all his days, and an infant who has done no good. These shew us the way of entrance. Hence the passage means not, except ye become humble, teachable, meek, gentle, &c., as infants (they are *not* so); but except ye turn round, completely change your mind (be converted), and humble yourselves (come down from your high thoughts), ye shall not get in at all. Not only, ye shall not have a high place,—an "abundant entrance," but no entrance at all.

The way, then, of becoming great is to become little,—of being the greatest, is to become the least. This was the Master's way; he took the lowest place, and he was exalted to the highest. He made himself of no reputation, therefore he gets the name above every name. Before honour is humility,—stooping to the consciousness of having deserved nothing. The Master went far beyond us here, for we truly deserved nothing, and therefore ought to take the lowest place; he deserved everything, yet lived and acted, as if he had deserved only sorrow, and pain, and shame, and the death of the cross.

Let us then learn,

(1.) *The way of entrance.* Go in as an infant, carried

in by another,—without claim, merit, goodness; owing all to the free love of God; of Him who spared not his own Son. Faith acknowledges this nothingness, and goes in; unbelief refuses to do so, and is kept out. What keeps us in darkness or doubt, but the desire to have some goodness either in life or feeling to secure our entrance and recommend us to the King?

(2.) *The principle of recompense.* Not merit; not personal worth and greatness. *The acknowledgment of unworthiness even to get in at all.* Yet we must work for God,—suffer for God, deny ourselves for God,—and all these (even the cup of cold water) will be remembered and recompensed. Yet in that recompense (even of these whose crown shall be the brightest) there will be the distinct consciousness of undeservedness all the while. “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee.”

How simple! how blessed! Ah surely God’s thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways.

XVIII.

THE SEEKER AND SAVIOUR OF THE LOST.

*“For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.”—MATT.
XVIII. II.*

*“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
—LUKE XIX. 10.*

MANY of our Lord's words were spoken twice over, if not oftener. He did not think it beneath Him to repeat Himself; and the Holy Spirit did not think it unnecessary or unbefitting to record the repetition.

Here it is in connection with little children that the words occur, “The Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” Elsewhere it is in connection with Zaccheus, the publican. In the former case his errand is said simply to be “to save,” as if “seeking” were not needed in the case of infants who have not yet plunged into the labyrinths and thickets of earthly wickedness. In the latter his errand is, “to seek and to save,” as if search were needed in order to find the lost object.

A very particular and personal message this to our children! The mission of the Son of God has a special bearing on them. The good Shepherd came very specially for them. He singles them out as most prominent objects of his love. So far from their being overlooked or getting salvation in some side way, his errand was particularly to them. And does He not plainly tell us here that they need *salvation*? They can only get into heaven by being

saved. They were as truly *lost* as others ; and they need salvation as truly ; and they get it as fully.

But let us put the two passages together and take them as embracing our race. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." "Preach the gospel to every creature."

I. *The Son of man*. This means, of course, one who was truly and thoroughly man,—very man. Adam was man ; but he was not a "son of man," or "the son of man." This name brings out very expressively his true humanity. It is like, and yet unlike, to the ancient words of the first promise, "the seed of the woman," and the expression of Paul, "made of a woman." It is more than these, for "son of *man*" means "son of humanity ;" son both of the man and the woman. He is indeed "the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. xv. 47); yet is He "the second *man*," the "last *Adam*." There must have been something in Ezekiel which made him in this respect resemble Messiah, for upwards of ninety times he is addressed as "son of man," and it is in his prophecies that the expression occurs so often. Daniel uses it in reference to Messiah, and David uses it as expressive of complete and true humanity. He whose name is Jesus, Emmanuel, Christ, the Lord, is truly Son of man.

II. *The Son of man came*. He *came* ! From the beginning He had been known as the coming one ; now He is the one who *has come*. The Son of God has become the Son of man. He has descended to earth. He came to Bethlehem first, and afterwards He might be said to have come to all Judea. For ages the coming was prospective ;

yet even as such it was replete with gladness ; now it is accomplished ; He has arrived ; how much more of gladness is contained in this fact ! “ We know that the Son of God is COME.” “ Blessed is He that COMETH in the name of the Lord.”

III. *He came to seek.* “ I will *search* my sheep, and *seek* them out,” says He by Ezekiel (xxxiv. 11). He was the Shepherd who had lost his sheep, and He missed it, valued it, left the rest, went after it, sought for it, all the world over. His was a *seeking* life, a *seeking* ministry. His were *seeking* words and *seeking* works. He is the great seeker, the heavenly seeker. His days were spent in *search*. He sought when He was here ; He is seeking still. His is the same seeking attitude and earnestness now in heaven as formerly on earth. He seeks in *love*. Not as the officer seeks out the hiding criminal ; but as the mother seeks her lost child. It is the search of love, divine yet human love ; love that will not wait till the desired object of search shews symptoms of concern or willingness to return, but love that pursues the flying, the unwilling, the resisting. Many are the places in which He finds and has found his stray ones : one He found upon a cross, one by a well, one in a boat, one in a sycamore tree. It matters not.

IV. *He came to save.* His name is *Saviour* ; his errand is *salvation*. Nothing less than this. It is salvation that man needs ; it is salvation that Christ brings. He is “mighty to *save*.” He is “able to *save* to the uttermost.” He says, look unto me and be ye *saved*. He came not simply to make men moral, and raise them from savage

coarseness ; to give wisdom or teach science ; to “elevate the masses ;” to make men regular church-goers or obedient citizens. He came to *save* ; and his gospel is the power of God unto *salvation*. The Father sent the Son to be the *Saviour* of the world. He “comes in the name of the Lord to *save*.” Salvation is a wide and big word, as used by God. In man’s lips it may and often does mean very little. It means sometimes sacramental grace, or ritualistic drapery, or supercilious churchmanship. But, according to the divine use and interpretation of the word, it means much, very much. It means something whose greatness can only be measured by the greatness of the Person who came ; by the greatness of the work which He accomplished ; by the greatness of his toil and suffering ; by the greatness of the price He paid. It is something which apostolic succession and baptismal regeneration cannot give,—something far beyond the power of church, or priest, or sacraments, to confer.

V. *He came to save the lost.* The lost ! And who are they ? Not simply those whom man describes as lost to shame, lost to decency, lost to all human motives of right, but such as are lost to God ; lost to their great Maker and Owner ; lost in the sense in which the sheep is lost to the shepherd ; the piece of silver to the woman ; the son to the father. They are they whom God has lost. The great Father has lost a son ; man has lost God, and God has lost man. They are lost in respect of separation from God—distance from God. They are lost in regard to present favour and future hope. They have lost everything ; they are lost to everything. Shepherd, and woman,

and father, have sustained an awful loss ; but what is this to the loss of those who have lost God, and are lost to God. To be lost is to be dead in sin ; to be condemned and under wrath ; to be banished and shut out ; to have unpardoned sin overhanging them, and a deadly disease preying on their whole man. To have the heart empty of God, at war with the Spirit, and in alliance with the evil one ; to be reduced to such a state of unholiness that all spiritual life, or relish, or love, is gone ;—this is to be lost ; lost even *now* : apart from the woes of that hell that is at hand.

O man, thou art *lost* ; and that word means something unutterably awful ; something which only the Spirit of God can reveal to you. But the Son of man has come to seek and save you. He is bent on this. It is his errand, his mission. No matter how *lost* you are. He is not willing that you should perish. He has no pleasure in your death. He seeks your life. He desires to save.

XIX.

THE STONE OF SALVATION OR DESTRUCTION.

"And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."—MATT. XXI. 44.

WHAT is there about the "stone" or the "rock," that makes God so often point to it, when speaking of Himself and of his Son? Many are the truths which cluster round it, or are wrapt up in it. It is one of these mines out of which one digs some of the most precious thoughts of God,—thoughts in which we sinners of earth have the chief share.

He gives us his own name as the "Rock of Israel" (2 Sam. xxiii. 3), and his Son's name, as the "Stone of Israel" (Gen. xlix. 24). He speaks of Himself as the "Rock of Ages" (Isa. xxvi. 4), and of his Son as the "tried stone," the "precious corner-stone" (Isa. xxviii. 16). He calls Himself "the rock that begat us" (Deut. xxxii. 18), and his Son, "the living stone" (1 Peter ii. 4).

He taught Israel to say, "Their rock is not as our Rock" (Deut. xxxii. 31); "neither is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. ii. 2). He taught his believing ones to take up this as their song: "Unto thee will I cry O Lord, my *Rock*" (Ps. xxviii. 1); "Lead me to the *Rock* that is higher than I" (Ps. lxi. 2); "Be thou my strong *Rock*" (Ps. xxxi. 2). "God is the *Rock* of my heart" (Ps. lxxiii. 26, margin); "Make a joyful noise to the *Rock* of our salvation" (Ps. xcv. 1).

It is plain, then, that God has much to say of this stone or rock, and it is His desire that we should learn the meaning of what He has said, and enter into his thoughts respecting it. He points us to this stone, and bids us look at it that we may see in it what *He* sees, and so may, at once, get the manifold benefits which it contains. For such is the nature of that stone, and such its virtues and benefits, that to enter into the mind of God concerning it, is to make these virtues and benefits our own.

One special aspect under which God asks us to look at this stone, is as a *foundation-stone*; and we need hardly say that it is to his only-begotten Son that he is pointing, when He says, "Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone (Isa. xxviii. 16, 1 Peter ii. 6).

"On *this* rock," said the Lord, "will I build my church," pointing to Himself; just as He said at another time, "Destroy *this* temple, and in three days will I raise it up." Often is the "rock" or "stone" thus referred to in connection with Himself. The passage before us brings out four things in connection with this stone,—four aspects or bearings of it. These are as follow :—

I. *It is the stone of rejection.* Probably there was some stone which Solomon's builders or architects set aside at first as unfit, which was afterwards found to be altogether suitable. This is used as a symbol for Messiah's rejection by Israel. He was meant to be the foundation-stone, the corner-stone; but Israel would have none of Him as such. He was not the stone of their choice or approval. He was "disallowed of men" (1 Peter ii. 4). He is the rejected stone; the rejected Saviour; the rejected king. He is

rejected specially by the *builders*, not only by the common workmen. Everything connected with Him has been rejected; He came unto His own and his own received Him not; He was despised and rejected of men; He was one in whom men saw no beauty. It is at this point that God is standing and presenting Christ to the sons of men. What think ye of Christ? Do you receive Him or reject Him? Decide. This stone is the test or touchstone in the real character and standing of men. Man's estimate of this stone is the ground of God's estimate of Israel or of humanity. On this everything is made to turn. What is this stone to you, O man? What is its value in your eyes? This is about the last test that man thinks of in determining character; but with God it is the first; or rather, it is both the first and the last. He who accepts God's estimate of this stone is saved; he who rejects it, and prefers his own,—takes the estimate of the builders,—is lost. On *our* estimate of this stone our eternity turns.

II. *The stone of honour.* God has made it the head of the corner. God reverses man's estimate of this wonderful stone. He declares it worthy of the highest and most honourable place. This place he has assigned to it. The sign or emblem of man's rejection was the cross, the sign of God's acceptance and honour was the throne of the majesty in the heavens. In the one, we see man's contempt, in the other, God's admiration and approval. It was as a *temple-stone* that it was rejected; it was as a *temple-stone* that it was honoured. It was the *last* thing that man would have thought of in building his temple; it is the first thing that God thinks of; he makes it both

foundation-stone and corner-stone. It was the stone that man could do without in his temple ; it was that without which God could not build his temple ; nay, without which there could not be any temple at all. "God hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name." This exaltation to the highest point of the universe, of that which man had tried to cast down to the lowest, is the thing which shews this pre-eminence to be truly *divine* ; altogether superhuman ; something which God only could accomplish. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Surely this is the man whom the Lord delighteth to honour.

III. *The stone of stumbling.* It is called by two peculiar and somewhat similar names ; "a stone of stumbling," or a stone against which people strike and injure themselves (*πρὸςκόματος*) ; a rock of offence, or a rock over which people trip (*σκανδάλον*). This stone has both of these characteristics. These two things are comprised in our Lord's expression, "shall be broken." These are the two ways in which men are affected by it just now ; for these two things refer plainly to the present dispensation,—the state of things since Messiah came, which is to continue till He comes again. These are the two ways in which unbelief shews itself ; it strikes against, or it stumbles over the stone ; it resists and assails it to its own injury ; or it makes such mistakes concerning it, that it upsets the man. For all unbelief either denies the cross or makes it void. It is thus that the human race (not Israel only) is brought into contact with this stone ; this Messiah ; Jesus of Nazareth. How many in the present day are dashing

themselves against it, and so perishing by bold rejection? How many are refusing to believe simply what God has told us about it,—either adding something of their own to it, or taking something from it?—and so, with the name of Jesus on their lips, missing the pardon, and the life, and the glory which He came to bring. They are not satisfied with Jesus as He is; with the cross as it is; or at least they imagine that Jesus cannot accept them as they are, and that the cross cannot avail them as they are. So they would wait, and work, and pray, and feel, and repent, and add one thing to another, to make the Saviour sufficient, and the blood effectual, for them. They shrink from taking Jesus *as He is*; they shrink from accepting His fulness *as they are*. Jesus, “the Son of God,” the “Saviour of the world,” the “receiver of sinners,” the “seeker of the lost,” is not to them what the Father represents Him. There is still, if not a gulf, at least a line between them and Him; there is still something needed to be done and felt by them to effect the junction between them, and to draw out His riches. In other words, “they stumble at this stumbling stone.” They will not, *just as they are*, take Him for *just what He is*. It is this “stumbling” that is keeping multitudes from peace. God’s testimony concerning Jesus does not satisfy them. They, in fact, want another Saviour; for they insist that they must be different from what they are before they can expect Him to save them. Alas! “Who hath believed our report?”

IV. *The stone of destruction.* This is when He comes the second time. Just now the first part of his statement

is fulfilling, "Whoso falleth on this stone shall be broken;" ere long the second part shall be fulfilled, "On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." This is the falling of the mighty stone upon a Christ-rejecting world! This is the final ruin of unbelievers. This is the "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power." He comes not only to break his rejectors in pieces, like a potter's vessel; but to grind these pieces into powder. That day of destruction cometh! Christendom is preparing for it. The vine of the earth is fast ripening for the treading of the terrible vintage;—in the day of the vengeance of the Lord.

XX.

THE THINGS TOUCHING THE KING.

“*What think ye of Christ?*”—MATT. XXII. 42.

THE Lord's question here was specially meant for Jews. They were expecting Messiah, *the* Christ; studying Scripture to know what had been written of Him; and so our Lord asks, What is your opinion of the Christ? Is it according to the Scriptures? Are you of one mind with Moses, with David, with the prophets, with God himself, concerning Him?

This was Christ's question to the Jews; it is his question to us in these last days.

What are your views on the points connected with Jesus of Nazareth? Are they true or false? scriptural or unscriptural?

1. *As to his person.* Is He God to you? Is he man to you? Son of God and Son of man?—Immanuel? the Word made flesh? God manifest in flesh?

2. *As to his work.* Is it to you the work of a sinner-bearer? Is it finished? And are you enjoying it as finished or only half finished? His blood, his righteousness, his cross, what are they to you?

3. *As to his kingdom.* Is it a righteous yet also a glorious kingdom to you? Do you understand the mode and the terms of entrance? the new birth, and simple faith in the King?

On these three great points are your views right or wrong? Are you of one mind with God as to each of them? To be of one mind with God is faith; not to be of one mind is unbelief. Naturally we are wrong on these points. The Scripture, through the teaching of the Holy Ghost, sets us right.

1. *Is thy understanding right as to these things?* Dost thou *know* them?

2. *Is thy heart right as to them?* Dost thou feel them? Hast thou not only got hold of them, but have they got hold of thee?

3. *Is thy life right as to them?* Art thou a better, truer, holier, and more earnest man because of them? Is thy whole life, thy whole being, outer and inner, moulded by them? Or are there still other influences working more powerfully than these? If thy understanding and heart have received these, then thy *life* will shew this. There will be fruit unto holiness. The truth, the joy, the light will shine *through* thee, and shine out from thee, on all around.

What then think ye of Christ? Is He such as you can love and trust?

1. *As a Saviour.* Is He the Saviour that suits thee? And dost thou appreciate his great salvation? Are you glad to have Him for your Saviour? Or have you any fault to find with Him as such? Would some change in his person or work have made Him more suitable?

2. *As a friend.* Is He the friend you need? Is his the friendship, the *kind* of friendship, that suits your

circumstances, your feelings, your temperament? Is his the kind of sympathy, and counsel, and wisdom, which you feel you need from a friend?

3. *As an advocate.* You need intercession; one to plead for you. Does his advocacy suit you? Can you trust Him with your case? Can you put everything in his hands, that He may manage all your concerns for you? Do you see how successful He has been with every case He has undertaken; not losing one; and can you trust Him with yours;—his skill, wisdom, love, argument, eloquence? Is Jesus Christ the righteous, just the kind of advocate you need? and are you just the client for such an advocate?

4. *As a King.* Is He just such a King as you should like,—as suits you,—as suits this earth,—as suits the universe? And what say you to Him as a Judge? You that shall never come into condemnation, do you enjoy the thought of Him as the Judge? You that are still under condemnation, what think ye of Him as a Judge? What do you say to his being *your* Judge? What think ye of standing before Him and giving in your account to Him?

What think ye of Christ? Do you say, “I think Him the chief among ten thousand”?—It is well. Do you say, I know not what to think? Ah, take heed, there is something wrong within you, if not all wrong together. Do you give no answer? It matters not. We shall soon find it out. By the company you keep; the books you read; the way in which you lay out your talents and time and money; the way you transact business; your

dealings in the market; your conduct at home; your letters and correspondence; your conversation with neighbours;—by these we shall find out what you think of Him.

XXI.

THE CHILL OF LOVE.

"Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."—

MATT. XXIV. 12.

THIS is to be specially true of the last days, so that, as our Lord elsewhere said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find *faith* on the earth?" here he may be supposed to be asking a similar question, When the Son of man cometh, shall he find *love* on the earth?

But while this is to be *fulfilled* in the last days, it is not confined to these. Such is the tendency of every age, every church, every saint. In this present evil world the tendencies are all evil; downward, not upward.

Increasing evil and decreasing good; this is the *general* statement. But our Lord's words are more special. It is of decreasing *love* that he speaks: "Thou hast left thy first *love*." Let us notice some of the things which *decrease* when sin *increases*.

1. *As iniquity increases, faith decreases.* Unbelief overflows like a deluge. One sin lets loose another. Faith withers down; dies out, like a flower in a desert.

2. *As iniquity increases, truth decreases.* For error is sin, and sin is error; so that truth and sin cannot co-exist. Sin expels truth, both from the heart and from the world; from the individual saint, and from the church at large. Darkness dispossesses light.

3. *As iniquity increases, righteousness and holiness decrease.* A man cannot be both holy and unholy; the encroachments of sin can leave no room for holiness at all. Inch by inch, iniquity creeps in and creeps along.

4. *As iniquity increases, religion decreases.* Sin drives religion out of the heart, out of the church, out of the world. With abounding iniquity prayer dies out, and praise, and zeal. The service of God becomes irksome; the form without the power is the first stage of the declension; and the second is the abandonment of both power and form.

5. *As iniquity increases, delight in the things of God decreases.* Sin soon shuts the Bible, and takes away all relish or appetite for it, except as a book of poetry or antiquity. Pleasure in sin cannot co-exist with pleasure in the Word of God, or the day of God, or any of the things of God.

But the special thing of which our Lord predicts the decrease is *love*,—love to God, love to Himself, love to one another. The atmosphere of sin is poisonous to everything sacred; but the thing which it first especially acts upon is *love*. It chokes this immediately. Hence the first thing noticed by our Lord in regard to Ephesus, was her leaving her first love. Love is the tenderest of all the plants of heaven, and the most easily affected by the deleterious or cold atmosphere of earth. The first step backward and downward is failure in love. A chill comes over us. Something intervenes between us and Christ, between us and our fellow-saints. We begin to grow cold, and then we freeze. This is specially to be

the case in the last days, but the *tendency* is the same throughout the whole dispensation,—increasing sin, decreasing love. The Greek word for iniquity is “lawlessness” (ἡ ἀνομία); regardlessness of that law of which love is the fulfilling; assimilation to the great Antichrist, who is specially the lawless one (ὁ ἀνομος); and as the characteristic of this lawless one is hatred of Christ and of his church, so is every step in “iniquity” an advance to this great image of sin, this model of hell, Satan’s truest representative.

The evil predicted by our Lord is threefold. It is love (1) frozen out of *the world* by abounding iniquity; (2) frozen out of *the church*; (3) frozen out of *the saint*. A world without love, a church without love, a saint without love! It is not of a *few*, but of the *multitude* (the οἱ πολλοί), “the *most*,” that this is affirmed. Coldheartedness will be all but universal; and even those who do love will love but little. Theirs will be but cold love,—half a heart given to Christ; less than half a heart given to the saints.

Let us watch against sin,—all sin; tremble at its increase. Cherish the flame of love; for “if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ he shall be anathema maranatha.”

XXII.

TRUE VIGILS.

“ Watch therefore ; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Therefore be ye also ready : for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”—MATT. XXIV. 42, 44.

WE take this warning as meant for us, as truly as for the early church ; we might say more truly, or at least, more forcibly ; for eighteen centuries have brought us so much nearer the consummation. It is the Master's own warning. It is very explicit ; very practical ; very searching. Let us take it in the following order :—

I. *Our Lord will come.* (1.) His name is *Lord* ; Master ; Ruler ; the very word applied to Jehovah. (2.) His name is *our*, or your, Lord,—“ Your Lord.” He is thus connected with us and we with Him, as friend, master, teacher, king. Our Lord will come ! This is one of the great *certainties* of the unknown future. He may tarry ; but He will come at last. Many obstacles may seem to rise up, but He will come. Men may not desire Him ; but He will come. The Church may be cold ; but He will come. Earth may think she has no need of Him ; but He will come ! The scofier may say, Where is the promise of his coming ? but He will come. Satan may do his utmost to oppose ; but He will come. This is the great future certainty which Christ and his apostles have proclaimed to us. Our Lord will come !

II. *We know not at what hour.* The Father knows, but we know not; no man nor angel; nor the church, nor any saint; nay, it is said, "not the Son." This is one of the great secrets of God. That it should be made so to man is easily accounted for; why it is so to angels, and why it was so to the Son, is not for us to say. It must be an *important* one, when thus restricted to the Father himself. It must have some peculiar purpose to serve. What that is we know not now, but we shall know hereafter. The hour is, no doubt, fixed in God's purpose, but the knowledge of that time is kept from us. They do wrong, then, who try to fix the hour, thus seeking to extract a secret from God. They do wrong who neglect the whole subject because this secret is connected with it. They do wrong who scoff at the whole subject because of the rash attempts or wretched failures of some pretended interpreters of prophecy. Thus, "we know," and "we know not;" we know that He will come; we know not *when*.

III. *Watch.* Like the watchman on his tower; like the soldier with the enemy in view; like the pilot with rocks and straits on every side; like the householder with the dread of the midnight robber,—"*watch*"! (1.) Do not fall asleep; (2.) do not grow slothful; (3.) be ever on the outlook. The reason given, then, is that the Lord is coming, and we do not know the hour. He illustrates the warning thus,—If a householder knew that the thief was coming *at a particular hour*, he would have watched; much more if He did not know the hour, but simply that He was coming sometime. So with us; the simple knowledge that the Lord is to come, is to make us watch-

ful,—even if we knew *when*; how much more when we do not know when. Let us beware of being thrown off our guard by self, or the flesh, or Satan, or the world. Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober!

IV. *Be ready.* We may watch and yet not be ready. Our Lord insists on *both*. Ye are my disciples, be ready! Ye are saints, be ready! What is the readiness? There is (1.) readiness of *standing*,—"complete in Him,"—"by grace ye stand;" (2.) readiness of *raiment*,—we are to have on the fine linen, clean and white,—Christ's righteousness; (3.) readiness of *heart and soul*. We must love Him and love his appearing. Our longings must be towards Him; we must have the Spirit dwelling in us and sealing us. (4.) Readiness of spiritual state,—oil not only in our lamps, but in our vessels,—even the Holy Ghost himself. Be ready! The Master still cries.

The message here is thus a warning,—

(1.) *To the slothful saint.* Sleep not. Awake! Beware of falling under any influences that would make you indifferent to the Lord's appearing. Beware of worldly arguments; beware of pretended spiritual arguments; beware of confounding death and Christ's coming; beware of the errors and seductions of the age.

(2.) *To the undecided.* You are anxious, but you are not decided. You would fain be a Christian, but not just yet. You wish to be a follower of Jesus, but you wish to compromise,—or delay. Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Be decided at once; lest the Lord come and end your wavering.

(3.) *To the careless.* The world at large is thoroughly careless,—sleeping sound,—dreaming its dreams of vanity ; enjoying sin, vanity, luxury, pleasure, gaiety. Christ speaks: Awake ; sleep no more ! Awake, lest the Master be upon you. Awake, lest the flash of his avenging sword be the first thing that awakens you !

XXIII.

RELIGION WITHOUT THE HOLY GHOST.

"They took no oil with them."—MATT. XXV. 3.

THIS parable has many sides and aspects. It is prophetic; it is also practical. It suits all ages, but especially the last days. It suits the world, but specially the church of God; "if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear." It is searching and sifting; it is also quickening and comforting. It suits us well in these days of profession and fashionable religion and religiousness.

It divides the church into two classes,—the wise and the foolish: wise in God's sight, not man's; foolish in God's sight, not man's. Thus it is not a parable for the heathen, as if they only were foolish; nor for the profligate, as if they only were foolish; nor for the infidels, as if they only were foolish. But for the church. It comes in to the inner circle of Christian profession, and sifts it, divides it. Let it sift us and test us. Better to be weighed and found wanting *now* than hereafter. Better to be undeceived now than when it is too late. Let us notice,

I. *The points of likeness between the two classes.* (1.) They get the same name, virgins; (2.) they wear the same dress; (3.) they are on the same errand; (4.) they have both lamps; (5.) they have both vessels; (6.) they both slumber and sleep. They have thus many features in

common. Man could not discern the difference, at least for the time. The peril of mere *externalism* is that which our Lord points out here. No doubt there must be externalism. Religion must have an outside as well as an inside. The lamp must not only have oil, but it must burn: the external must indicate the internal. And we may say that our Lord intimated the necessity of a thorough consistency and completeness in the outward religious life of a man, so that as a fair external is no excuse for internal unsoundness or incompleteness, so a sound internal is no excuse for an inconsistent life. Our Lord, then, here depicts, (1.) a *complete* externalism; (2.) a *beautiful* externalism; (3.) a *deceptive* externalism; (4.) a *prolonged* externalism; (5.) an *unavailing* externalism. Up to a certain point in a man's life, or character, or religion, externalism may avail; but beyond that it gives way; it breaks down; it exhibits its unprofitableness. This externalism may not always be hypocrisy, but it is *imitation*. It is not the flower in its natural colour and growth, but painted, artificial. Let us watch against an artificial life, and an artificial religion. What does it profit now? what will it profit in the day of wrath? The name, the dress, the lamp, the outward show, will all go for nothing in that day of universal discovery and detection.

II. *The points of unlikeness.* Though in most respects they were all alike, yet there was a difference. It was *within*; it was imperceptible from without; it could only be discovered when the bridegroom came. Up till then all were completely similar. Only then the want came out in the foolish. Then was it seen who were wise, and

who were foolish. That day is the day of certain and unerring detection. It is the day of weighing in the balances ! It is the separation of the false from the true.

The difference was confined to a single point,—the lack of oil. Some have supposed that the foolish took oil in their *lamps*, but not in their *vessels*. It appears, however, that they did neither. The lamps were not required to be lighted till the bridegroom came ; and so the oil was not poured in, nor the wick inserted till then. For it was at midnight that the cry was made, and *then* all the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, that is, supplied them with the wick and oil, and lighted them. Then it was that the foolish discovered (1) their need of oil ; (2) their lack of it. Then they went to the wise to beg for a supply ; then they (being wisely refused) went to buy, and returned too late. There was “oil in the dwelling of the *wise*” (Prov. xxi. 20), but the foolish were without it.

The oil is the Holy Spirit. To oil He is likened throughout all Scripture, though in some places to fire, and to water, and to wind or air. There is the oil of consecration (Ex. xxx. 25) ; of daily food (1 Kings xvii. 12) ; of fragrance (Esther ii. 12) ; of joy (Ps. xlvii., Isa. lxi. 3) ; of healing (Luke x. 34) ; of light (Zech. iv. 12). The Holy Spirit is all these. But it is as the *light-giving* oil that He is specially spoken of here ; and the lack of Him as such makes the difference between the foolish and the wise. “Having not the Spirit” (Jude 19).

Thus a man may be very like a Christian, and yet not be one. He may come very near the kingdom, and yet not enter in. He may have all the outward features of a

Christian, and yet be lacking in the main one. He may have the complete dress of the saint, and yet not be one. He may have a good life, a sound creed, a strict profession ; he may be one who says and does many things excellent ; he may be a subscriber to all the religious societies in the land, a member of all their committees, or a speaker at all their meetings, and supporter of all their plans ; he may profess to be looking for Christ's coming, and going forth to meet the bridegroom, yet not necessarily a Christian ! He may lack the oil, the Holy Spirit.

A religion without the Holy Ghost profiteth nothing. There is the religion of the intellect, of the sense, of the fancy, of the flesh, of the creed, of the liturgy, of the catechism, of nature, of poetry, of sentiment, of mysticism, of humanity. But what are these without the Spirit ? Christianity without Christ, what would that be ? Worship without God, what would that be ? So religion without the Holy Spirit, what would that be ?

Yet is there not much of this among us ? Is there not much of dry formalism, lifeless doctrine, sapless routine ? I do not call it hypocrisy ; I simply call it *unreal religion*.

And what can unreal religion do for a man ? Will it not prove irksome and vain ? Will it make him happy and free, or liberal, or zealous, or holy ? No. It can do none of these things. It is bondage, and darkness, and weariness.

Yet here is the Holy Spirit in the hands of Christ for you. Go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. Not to men, or churches, or creeds, or ministers, but to Christ. Go to Him. He is exalted to give it ; and He will. Apply to Him ere it be too late.

XXIV.

THE GREAT SEPARATION.

*“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.”—*MATT. XXV. 31, 33.

LET us enter at once into the practical teaching of this parable, leaving its prophetical aspects untouched, as well as its connection with the two previous parables.

The name Christ takes here is the Son of man. This is always his name in connection with judgment. It is Daniel's name for Him in this connection; and it is as Son of man that He is judge of all. We are to be judged by a man like ourselves. It is before a human judge that we shall stand and plead. God takes no advantage of us.

I. *The coming.* (1.) The Son of man shall come! Yes, He that shall come will come and will not tarry! These heavens shall rend and He shall appear. (2.) He shall come in his glory. Not in weakness, and poverty, and shame; not as a babe, or a carpenter, or a bearer of the sin and curse. (3.) He shall come with all his holy angels. What a retinue! (a) Angels; (b) holy angels; (c) with Him! As his retinue, his attendants, his executioners; as in Daniel. Often have angels visited earth, but never on so awful an occasion.

II. *The sitting.* It is not a momentary appearance. He comes as the lightning flash, but does not, like it, depart. He takes his seat on a throne,—the throne of glory, not grace now. It is a great work He comes to do ; a work not done in a moment. He took his seat when He went up to the Father, and has been thus sitting for ages, for the work was great and long. So when He comes again He “sits,” for the work is great and long. It will be thorough, searching, sifting.

III. *The gathering.* Who shall gather is not here said. In other places angels are mentioned. But the gathering shall be : (1.) It is a gathering of men, not devils. (2.) It is a gathering of nations ; all nations ; a universal gathering. It is a gathering “before Him” ; before his throne ; before his face. No hiding, no escaping, no resisting, no refusing ! However reluctant, they shall be gathered. He shall see it fully done. Mountains, rocks, seas, cells, cannot hide men on that awful day.

IV. *The separating.* They come as one great multitude, but soon they are divided. (1.) They are divided into two classes, only two ; one good and one evil ; sheep and goats. (2.) They are divided by Himself. How He does it we know not. But He shall do it completely, effectually, without mistake,—one mistake. The separation shall be perfect and final. (3.) The sheep are set on the right hand, the place of honour, power, acquittal, favour ; the goats on the left, for shame and condemnation.

V. *The convicting.* He gives the reasons for what He does,—reasons to both classes ; these are all summed up

in one great reason, viz. : What they did or did not do for Him. The righteous are told that what they did for his brethren they did for Him ; the wicked, that what they did not do for his brethren they did not for Him. Thus the one class is made to feel how truly all their works are accepted, and the other left without excuse, not being able to say, Thou wert not here for us to do anything for thee. "Ah, but my brethren were here. Ye did it not to them." This stops their mouth.

VI. *The sentencing.* This is from the Judge's own lips. Angels may gather them, *He* must sentence them, for He is Lord and Judge of all. *First*, He turns to the right, and speaks to the sheep. (1.) Come, have done with all your wanderings and tribulations ; come, end your pilgrimage. (2.) Ye blessed—Oh, precious name—the blessed, the "well spoken of" ; among men perhaps only cursed ! (3.) Blessed of my Father ; not of man, nor of me only, but of my Father ; beloved of God and blessed of God ; this is the beginning, the foretaste of endless blessedness. (4.) Inherit the kingdom ; exile, oppression, weariness, end in a kingdom ;—they are kings and priests ;—an everlasting kingdom, long since prepared ! This is the recompense of toil, and work, and weariness for me,—of every service, however little, done to one of mine. Secondly, He turns to the left, and speaks to the goats. (1) Depart, come not near me, nor my kingdom. I once said, Come to me, and ye would not ; I now say, Depart. (2) Ye cursed ; not blessed, but cursed ; not merely under the curse, but with the curse poured down. (3) Into everlasting fire,—*fire*,—everlasting,—prepared for the devil

and his angels. Why? Simply ye did me no service! Not ye were drunkards, thieves, liars, Sabbath-breakers; but ye did nothing to me!

VII. *The executing.* These go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. "So he drove out the man," is the first execution of judgment. "They enter in through the gates in to the city" is the fulfilment of the gracious verdict. God carries out both his love and his vengeance. He falters not. "Judgment lingereth not, damnation slumbereth not." The day of the carrying out of all God's purposes and sentences will certainly arrive. What shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel! Oh terrible doom! woe, woe, woe, everlasting! What shall be the joy of the saved! Joy unspeakable, the crown of righteousness. These are the two great masses. They are mixed now; they shall be separated soon. The day of sifting is at hand.

XXV.

THE DENYING DISCIPLE.

“He denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.”—

MATT. XXVI. 70.

IT takes almightiness to *lift up* a soul from death ; and it needs no less to *hold up* the soul that has been raised. Hence the need of a divine quickener ; hence the preciousness of the blessed Spirit. He only can keep us from falling. Were He to let go, in a moment we fall. In Peter's case we see all this. It was an Almighty voice that called to him, “Follow me ;” and it was an Almighty hand that drew him out of his boat, and from his nets. It was an Almighty arm that sustained him. And now for a moment that arm lets him go, to prove him and shew him his weakness. In a moment he falls. His fall is one of the saddest and most awful that the Bible records. He denied his Lord. He denied him when he ought most to have confessed Him. He denied Him with oaths and curses.

Let us throw the statement of the evangelist into the following questions :—(1.) Who? (2.) Whom? (3.) What? (4.) When? (5.) Where? (6.) How?

I. *Who?* Judas? No. Nicodemus? No. Thomas, the doubter? No. Philip, the questioner? No. Peter? Yes ; Peter. Simon, son of Jonas. Peter, the rock ! Peter, the confessor of the Christ of God. Peter, the

fervent proclaimer of his fidelity and love. Peter, who took the sword against Malchus. Peter, who had been with the Master on the transfiguration-hill, and in the garden of his agony. Yes ; *Peter denies*. Poor human heart ! Lord, what is man ? What is even a converted man ? What is a disciple ? Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

II. *Whom?* It is his own Master whom he is thus treating ; Jesus, whom he had followed ; whom he had confessed ; and whom he seemed so truly to love. Jesus of Nazareth ! Jesus the Christ, the Son of God ; the Son of the blessed ! It is not a fellow disciple whom he thus treats ; it is his blessed Master ! O incredible mystery of human evil ! O desperate wickedness of the heart of man !

III. *What?* He denies Him. It is not forsaking Him merely. They had all done that. But it is denying Him. In this he stands alone. No one but Peter had said, *I know not* the man ;—he who had so lately said, *We know* that thou art the Christ ! What ingratitude, what falsehood, what inconsistency, what cowardice, are here ! But should *we* have done anything else had we been there ?

IV. *When?* Immediately after the supper and the garden scene ; after those wondrous words recorded by John as spoken in the upper room ; after listening to the awful cries of Gethsemane ! So soon after these ! Does it not seem impossible ! Yet with all these in remembrance, he denies his Lord.

V. *Where?* In the High Priest's hall ; within sight

and hearing of his Lord he does it. In circumstances in which we should have expected him nobly to confess Him. In the hour of danger. Surrounded with enemies. Forsaken by friends. Yes, in the very presence of his Master he denies Him. Untouched with pity for his desolation, and sorrow, and torture, he denies Him.

VI. *How?* He did it three times. He did it after being warned by the Lord. He did it through fear of a woman. He did it in the most decided way. He did it with oaths and curses. Oh, what a denial! "Woman, I know Him not!" Then, "Man, I know Him not." Then, "Man, I know not what thou sayest." And then the oaths and curses burst forth. O dreadful and incredible wickedness! The old fisherman of Galilee had, it would seem, been a swearer before his conversion. This swearing fisherman had been called by the Lord and become his follower. Three years' intercourse with Christ had done much for him. But the old man was not dead. The temptation was presented, and the old habit returned, the old blasphemies broke out. The old oaths came forth again; aye, and they came forth to clench his denial of his Master. "May I be cursed for ever if I know the man," he says. Simon, son of Jonas, is it thou? Is that thy voice? Ah, if your Master heard, what would He say? He heard! Yes, He heard the threefold denial, and the curses with which it was enforced. Yet no anger came from either lip or eye! The curse only drew out the love. Yes, at the sound of the last denial, invoking damnation on himself if he knew the man, the Lord

turned and looked. He looked in love, and the love conquered. Peter went out and wept. It was his last denial and his last oath. Satan had sifted him ; but the Lord steps in.

XXVI.

THE TRUE CONFESSOR AND THE FALSE.

“*I have sinned.*”—MATT XXVII. 4.

THIS is *confession*; so far as words go; we shall see what it amounts to. God lays great stress upon confession in his dealings with sinning man. It is as a confessor of sin that he draws near to God; and it is as such that God receives him. This is the only position, the only character in which God can deal with him. Covering sin will do nothing for us. It doubles the transgression.

Confession is the closest and most personal of all kinds of dealing with God. As praise is the telling out what we see in God, so confession is the telling out what we see in ourselves. It specially comprises matters which can be spoken in no ear but God's. There is, no doubt, *public* confession; but the largest part of confession is *private*. Man cannot be trusted with it; man must not even hear it. Hence, the wickedness of any man setting up for a confessor. Hence the sin of a *dishonest* confession; and the necessity of dealing honestly with God and our own consciences in a matter so entirely private and confidential. The attempt to deceive God, or to hide anything from Him, is as dangerous as it is wicked and inexcusable.

There are two kinds of confession, a false and a true.

We have instances of both of these in Scripture. They both make use of the same words, "I have sinned"; yet they do not mean the same thing, nor indicate the same state of feeling. Let us note some of the instances of the false.

There is (1) *Pharaoh*. Twice over he says, "I have sinned against the Lord (Exod. ix. 27 ; x. 16). (2) *Israel*. After deliberate disobedience, and as a declaration of farther disobedience, "We have sinned" (Num. xiv. 40). (3) *Balaam* (Num. xxii. 34.) He said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned." (4) *Achan*. (Josh. vii. 20), "Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel." (5) *Saul*. (1 Sam. xv. 24), "Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord." (6) *Judas*. (Matt. xxvii. 4), "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." These are examples of false confession. And its falsehood consisted in this,—

(1). *It was constrained*. It was extorted by terror and danger. It was not spontaneous or natural. These men would rather not have made it ; but they could not help themselves. It was merely the natural heart crying out in trouble.

(2). *It was selfish*. It was not the dishonour done to God, nor the injury to others, that they thought of ; but the consequences to themselves. It was not sin, *as sin*, that was confessed and hated.

(3). *It was superficial*. It was not the conscience, the inner man, that was stirred ; but the mere external part of man's being. The real nature of sin was unfelt. *Self*

was not abased nor loathed. There was no broken nor contrite heart.

(4). *It was impulsive.* Some judgment smote, or was to be averted; some affliction overwhelmed them; some sermon roused them. And under the impulse of such feelings they cried out, "I have sinned."

(5). *It was temporary.* It did not last. It was like the early cloud, it passed away. The words of confession had hardly passed their lips when the feeling was gone.

Let us beware of false confessions. Let us not cheat our souls, nor lull our consciences asleep, by uttering words of confession which are not the expressions of contrition and broken-heartedness. Let us deal honestly, searchingly, solemnly, with God and our own consciences. Godly sorrow is one thing, and the sorrow of the world is quite another. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." He wants *real* words.

But we have some examples of *no-confession*. We have *Adam* trying to hide his sin; *Cain* refusing to confess; and *Lamech* glorying in his shame. They are specimens of the immoveable and impenetrable; shewing the lengths to which a human heart can go.

But we have many notable instances of true confession; proclaiming to us the truth of the promise, "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy" (Prov. xxviii. 13); "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). David said, "I have sinned," and his confession brought forgiveness. Daniel said, "we have sinned," and he found forgiveness. Yes, true confession brings certain pardon. We have but

one Confessor and one Confessional; and both are heavenly, not earthly; we need no more.

In true confession we take our proper place. We take the only place in which God can deal with us; the only place in which it would not dishonour him to pardon us,—the sinner's place. And he who is willing to take this place is sure of the acceptance which the forgiving God presents. The Spirit's work in convincing of sin is to bring us to our true place before God. He who takes this but in part gets no pardon. He who tries to occupy a higher or better place must be rejected. He who tries to deal with God as not wholly a sinner, as something better than a mere sinner, shuts himself out from favour. He who goes to God simply as a sinner, shall find favour at the hands of him who receiveth sinners, who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Everything depends on this. If he goes to God with some goodness to recommend him; some good feeling; some softness of heart; some excellence in his own faith or repentance to recommend him, he cannot be received. But he who goes simply as a sinner, will taste that the Lord is gracious.

In true confession we come to see sin somewhat as God sees it; and ourselves somewhat as God sees us. I say *somewhat*; because we cannot here *fully* enter into his mind regarding sin and the sinner; we see but in part, and feel but in part. It is but a faint glimpse we get of sin and of ourselves. But it is with this that we go to God, having learned something, though but in the remotest degree of what sin is and deserves, and of what He thinks of it. We take *his report* of what sin is, and of what we

are, whether we *feel* it or not. We believe what He has said about these things ; and accepting His testimony to the evil of sin, even in spite of our own want of feeling, we confess it before Him, and receive at his hands that forgiveness which, while it pacifies the conscience, makes sin more odious, and our own hearts more sensitive and tender.

We take the prodigal's words, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." We turn our eye and our feet homewards. We remember the past ; we look round us on the desolation of the "far country" ; we listen to the good news of our Father's open door and loving heart ; we arise and go. And at every step, as we draw near, our view of sin intensifies, our self-aborrence increases, our sense of ingratitude deepens ; and yet the certain knowledge of our Father's profound compassion and unchanged affection sustains us, cheers us ; so that we draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith ; knowing that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

XXVII.

RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST.

"For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."—MARK III. 35.

RELATIONSHIP to Christ is the special theme of our Lord's statement here. It was started by the appearance of his earthly relations on the outside of the crowd that was listening to Him. His mother and his brothers (brothers in the common sense) stood without, and sent to call him. The crowd conveyed the message, and that message drew out the scene and the words that followed. There was presumption in the conduct of his mother and brothers ; yet He does not *directly* rebuke this interference, though indirectly he does, asking, "Who are my mother and brothers?" As the answer to this question, he looks at the crowd close around him, not at the relatives standing without and calling ; as if seeking for truer kindred among the former ; as if earthly kinship were quite an inferior thing. The relationships of blood were, after all, external and perishable ; it is not in his own family, but among the stranger multitude, that the deeper and more enduring kinship is to be sought,—a kinship of which all may be partakers,—for the earthly connection could of course belong only to a few, the heavenly was capable of illimitable extension. Relationship to Jesus is presented freely to the sons of men.

Thus our Lord disposes of the question of mere blood-relationship, of which man has made so much. It is human, not divine ; earthly, not heavenly. He also himself thus shakes off the claims which mere earthly ties would have made upon him. He does not deny the lower bond, but he shews that it is merged in the far higher one, as taper-light is lost in sunlight. Thus far he severs the one bond, that he may knit the other more closely and firmly ; shewing himself in a far higher and diviner association than men conceived, and thereby correcting the carnal mistakes into which unbelief and self-righteousness and superstition are so prone to fall.

Christ still speaks, and speaks to *us*, concerning this matter. He still stands with outstretched hand, as he has been doing throughout the ages, saying, "Who is my mother and my brothers?" He still invites the crowds of earth, in the centre of whom he is standing, to partake of the blessing, and to become his kindred, his own nearest relatives,—mother, brother, sister, all in one. Mark these three things regarding this relationship (1), its importance ; (2), its formation ; (3), its manifestation.

I. *Its importance.* Rank and relationship are among men reckoned things of moment. They involve so much, not only of privilege, but of affection and sympathy. How important are these human affinities and alliances ! To be related to kings, to have royal blood in our veins, this is one of man's highest boasts. How much more to be related to the King of kings ! Earthly relationships do little for us, but this will do everything ; and what it does is for evermore. It is an everlasting relationship.

(1.) *It delivers us from what is earthly and vain.* It is only by the formation of a higher kinship that we can be severed from the drag of the carnal and the common. Thus we are set free from the bondage, and the routine, and the vanity of earth. It breaks the chains of hell.

(2.) *It connects with salvation and eternal life.* It is the grafting into the living stem of the vine. It not only severs us from destruction, but it links us to life and joy. He whose kinsmen we become, quickens and saves us. Because He lives we shall live also.

(3.) *It connects us with honour and glory.* All that our kinsman has, becomes ours ; his rank, his property, his rights, his honours, his prospects. Our interests are henceforth bound up with his for evermore. He is a son, so do we become. He is an heir, so we become. He is a king, so we become. "We are made partakers with Christ," say, "partakers of the divine nature."

II. *Its formation.* This is given us in these memorable words, both positively and negatively, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12). This is the first point at which we commence doing the will of God. Thus we have the formation of the new tie declared to us. We become sons of God, and we do so by our acceptance of the Son of God ; or we may say by our acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth, as being what God declares him to be, the word made flesh, the Son of God. "He that believeth

that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." The internal process itself is the work of the Holy Ghost, the result of a sovereign purpose, a new creation. But the visible or conscious part of it is our *receiving* Christ. Not prayer, nor reformation, nor repentance, but simply our reception of Christ; this is all. This introduces us at once into the new relationship; the new rank, the new position, the new glory. Reception of Jesus as the Son of God is the one link that binds us to God, and brings us into the new family, and makes us partakers of the household of faith in all their privileges and honours. Acceptance of Jesus! Dost thou know that, O man? Acceptance of Jesus according to the Father's testimony, that is all! Hast thou received Him as God manifest in flesh, the Lamb of God? If not, thou art not his kinsman. Thou art still of the kindred of earth; nay, of hell.

III. *Its manifestation.* A life of service, of doing the Father's will. Our first act of faith was our first doing of that will. Our whole subsequent life is a doing of it; and in doing it we make manifest whose we are, to whose kindred we belong, of whose family or household we are members.

Every real doing of this divine will is a proof and exhibition of our relationship; every non-doing of this will, or opposition to it, is a manifestation of our earthly kindred. Here, then, we have the test of our Christianity, a *life of divine will-doing*. We say that we are Christians, Christ's kinsmen; well, let us try ourselves. Are we doing the will of our Father in heaven,—his Father and our Father,—and so openly identifying ourselves with him?

(1.) Are our *hearts* doing the Father's will? Is that will our will?

(2.) Are our *intellects* doing the Father's will? In the present day man's intellect is utterly in revolt against God. Has ours been brought into glad subjection?

(3.) Are our *purposes* doing the Father's will? Each day is full of purposes and schemes. What are these? Earthly or heavenly? Holy or unholy?

(4.) Is our *life* doing the Father's will? Life, be it short or long, is made up of many parts. What is the nature of these myriad things that make up what we call our daily life?

(5.) Is our *family life* doing the Father's will? And are we by the way in which we regulate it, shewing that we are kinsmen of the Lord Jesus Christ?

(6.) Is our *business life* doing the Father's will? Have we taken God into partnership with us, and are all our transactions regulated by a sense of His presence, and a desire for His approval?

Thus let us test our relationship to Christ. Not he that says, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of our Father in heaven; he is the kinsman of the Son of God; he it is to whom Jesus points and says, "the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

XXVIII.

THE GREAT CALM.

"The wind ceased and there was a great calm."—MARK. IV. 39.

IT is written, "He maketh the storm a calm" (Psalm cvii. 29). Of this our text gives a notable instance; even more notable than in the case of Jonah. In the Psalm it is Jehovah that does it; here it is Christ; identifying the calm-maker, the storm-stiller; and shewing that Jehovah and Jesus are one.

"*He* maketh the storm a calm;" *he*, not man; nor chance; nor the laws of nature. He raised the wind; he stilled it; just as truly as did Jesus on the sea of Galilee, when He arose and "rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm." The one is as directly his doing as the other.

The "calm," then, is the voice of God. It is not the fire, or the earthquake, or the whirlwind; but still it is the divine voice; the still small voice which, like the goodness of God, ought to melt our hard hearts, and lead us to repentance; to revive, and comfort, and cheer. It is the voice,—

(1.) *Of power.* The calm is as truly the manifestation of *power* as the storm. What power to still such storms; to bind such winds; to smooth such waves! Think of God's power in the *calm*.

(2.) *Of love.* He does not delight in the storm or its havoc, in the wind and its terror; his delight is in the calm; for God is love. It was the voice of love that on the lake of Tiberias produced the calm; and, in the calm, love is speaking still.

(3.) *Of peace.* The calm reminds us of pardon, and reconciliation, and friendship. "Peace be still" are the words of grace to us. "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." The calm is truly the peace-speaking voice of God,—of God, willing to be at peace with us, and asking us to be at peace with Him.

(4.) *Of warning.* No earthly calm lasts. It is often the prelude of a greater storm. The four angels held in the four winds; but it was only until the servants of God were sealed. Their very holding in was the warning. They were pent up for a brief season, that they might break loose the more terribly.

There are many storms and calms here; of all kinds, inner and outer; of the inner man, of the church, of the nation, of the world. All of them speak to us. Let us advert to two of these,—the present calm for the soul, and the future calm for earth.

I. *The inner calm.* There has been a *storm*. In every soul there has been this. Even in man's careless state there is enough of tempest to disturb his quiet. But when aroused by the Spirit, then the greatness of the storm begins. It rages through the man's whole being. But there is a *ruler* and a *stiller* of this storm; one who gives rest; who calms every tumult within. Jesus is He whose word produces the great calm in the tempest-driven soul

of the awakened sinner. It is a calm in three aspects, or three parts of man's being.

(1.) *In his conscience.* For it is chiefly in the conscience that the storm rages. The sense of guilt, remorse, terror, wrath, the prospect of judgment and eternal woe,—all these work together to raise a storm such as man cannot quell. Only the Son of God can lay these winds and waves. He speaks peace to the conscience through his cross and blood; his gospel of righteous peace, meeting all these different points of conflict and commotion, calms the *conscience*. It produces what the apostle calls no more conscience of sin.

(2.) *A calm in his heart.* That heart was the seat of conflicting feelings; loves, fears, hopes, joys, sympathies, antipathies. It was made to be filled; it wanted to be filled; and it had none to fill it. There was a storm in his heart. But now God has come in; Christ has come in; he has something now to love worthy of love; something to fill his heart; it is no longer tossed to and fro with the uncertainties and changes of creature-love. Divine love fills it; and that is calm for the heart; present calm; calm that grows more stable every day; the earnest of the everlasting calm.

(3.) *A calm in his intellect.* His mind was distracted. He was perplexed, puzzled, torn in pieces by doubt. What is truth? he asked himself. But no answer was to be had. The ever-rising, ever-shifting opinions of the world kept him in perpetual motion. His mind was not at rest. There was storm in his intellect; and all his powers seemed loosened, broken, unable to fix themselves.

But the Son of God has come! With Him the true knowledge has come; the knowledge of the Father and the Son; the knowledge of God's righteous love; the knowledge that satisfies,—that diffuses light through the intellect. There is a great calm. Jesus is teaching him; and in that teaching there is unutterable calm,—a true intellectual calm. His mental distraction and weariness are at an end. Each word from the lips of the great prophet seems so true, so real, so certain, that his whole intellectual being finds repose; it is the repose of activity, yet the activity of repose. There is a great calm.

II. *The future calm for earth.* In every aspect ours is a stormy world. In every sense, materially, morally, spiritually, intellectually, externally, internally,—there is the earthquake, the volcano, the whirlwind, the breeze, the tempest, the tide. All is restless. For sin is here. Alienation from God is here. The curse lies still on creation,—the kingdoms of earth are still hostile to God. Satan is still ruler of the darkness of this world. But its day of calm is coming. Jesus will yet speak to it and say, Peace be still; and there shall be a great calm, the calm of the new heavens and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. He comes,—

(1.) *As a prophet;* to impart wisdom and knowledge to its inhabitants. That calm shall be the calm of true wisdom,—the calm of the heavenly light,—the calm realised in the fulfilment of the word, "They shall be all taught of God."

(2.) *As a priest;* to impart universal pardon and cleansing to earth and its dwellers, through his one sacri-

fi ce. It shall be priestly calm ; calm diffused over this tempestuous earth by the word of the great High Priest.

(3.) *As a king* ; to impart royal calm ; the calm of heaven ; the calm which He only can give who is the King of kings. It is as a king that He comes ; it is as a king that He shall say, Peace be still ; and then shall be the great calm such as earth has never known.

XXIX.

ONLY BELIEVE.

"As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe."—MARK V. 36.

MOST of Christ's mighty works had to do with disease and health, with death and life. Not all of them; for we have the water turned into wine, and the multitude fed. But *most* of them were as we have said. Here it is death with which He is brought into contact; and He deals with it as the Prince of life.

At three different stages does he meet with and overcome death, and him that has the power of death. (1.) The newly dead, as here in the case of Jairus' daughter. (2.) The dead of a day, as in the son of the widow of Nain. (3.) The dead of four days. Each time He encounters more of death, and has to go down deeper into the horrible pit. But in all the three (and no doubt there were many such) He is the conqueror,—the resurrection and the life. But let us look at the whole miracle; it is one of sickness and death; and in connection with these there is the persuasion that Christ was the only deliverer.

We see (1.) faith; (2.) faith giving way; (3.) faith strengthened and encouraged; (4.) faith victorious; (5.) unbelief rebuked.

I. *Faith.* The faith of Jairus;—of both father and

mother; for both seem to have turned their eye to Jesus. He is probably a Pharisee; like Nicodemus, a master in Israel; the ruler of the synagogue,—a well-known man in Capernaum. But he has heard of Jesus,—of his wonders,—how he can overcome disease; and as his little daughter lies dying, he leaves her bedside to go in quest of Jesus. It is faith that sends him on this errand; faith in Jesus as the *healer*; for at first his faith only reached thus far. But Jesus leads him on; and the faith that began with trusting Him as the physician, ends with realising in Him the raiser of the dead. For faith often begins with little, and ends in much; it begins with a trickling streamlet, and ends with a full broad river; it begins with a few streaks of light, and ends with the glorious dawn, or more glorious noon.

II. *Faith giving way.* I do not say that the father's faith gave way,—though from the words of Jesus it seems to have wavered. But the mother's faith had done so; for she had sent the messenger with the desponding message, "Thy daughter is dead, why troublest thou the Master any further?" Her faith had found its limit (as in the case of Martha and Mary,—Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died); it took hold of Jesus as the healer of the sick, but it went no farther. She knew *something* of Jesus; and that something had led her to think of Him; but it was little that she knew; and her faith soon came to an end. Had she known Him better, she would have either sent no message, but calmly waited his arrival; or it would have run very differently,—“Thy daughter is dead, urge the Master to come.” Ah, does

not our faith often thus fail,—just at this point? We can go to Him for a little thing ; we cannot go to Him for a great thing. We count it presumption to expect much. Instead of feeling that the worse the case, the greater the glory to his power and love, we stop short, and cease to expect anything from Him at all. I need not trouble the Master, we say, my case is so desperate ; instead of saying, because my case is so desperate, I will trouble Him, I will give Him this opportunity of magnifying his skill and grace. Thus faith shews its feebleness. It gives way when any strain is put upon it. We can trust Jesus for a little, but not for much, not for all ! O we of little faith !

III. *Faith strengthened.* Christ speaks. “Fear not ; believe only and she shall be made whole.” He saw his faith staggering. The intelligence was a blow to it. He believed that Christ could heal her ; but can He bring her back from the dead ? There is a wide difference between these two things ; the one is human, the other superhuman. Christ’s words are for the strengthening of his faith in that which is superhuman. They are an intimation of the far greater fulness in Himself. They bid the man believe in that fulness, and dismiss all the fears which the sad intelligence had awakened. They assure him that it was quite as easy for the Master to raise the dead as to heal the sick. Fear not ; believe only ; and she shall be made whole. It is thus that He leads faith on and up, step by step ; making use of failure and evil tidings for this end. As the road grows darker the torch blazes brighter.

IV. *Faith victorious.* The dead child is raised. Thy faith hath saved thy child. Jesus and the believing father enter the house together,—go to the chamber of death. The father has taken Christ at his word ; he has believed ; he has recognised in Christ not merely the healer of the sick, but the resurrection and the life ; and in response to his faith his child is given back to him ; the chamber of death becomes the chamber of life. Faith has won the victory. That victory is resurrection ! He that believeth on me, though he were dead yet shall he live.

V. *Unbelief rebuked.* The father and mother believe, and they are admitted to see the great sight,—the earnest of that which shall be seen over all the earth when the trumpet shall sound. But it is an unbelieving household ; and the mourners make known their unbelief in mockery of Christ's resurrection-words. They are put out. They are not allowed to see the sight,—the gate of death unlocked by Him who has its keys ; and the prisoner brought forth. They only see the issue afterwards ; but from the glorious spectacle itself they are excluded. From how many blessed sights does unbelief shut us out. Into what chambers of life and blessedness does faith bring us ! Only believe !

XXX.

JESUS WONDERING AT MAN'S UNBELIEF.

"And he marvelled because of their unbelief."—MARK VI. 6.

I. *WHO marvelled?* It was the Son of God. Man's marvelling may not be much worth ; but Christ's has a deep meaning. His estimate was correct. He did not marvel amiss. It is not said that He grieved or was angry ; but He marvelled ! It was a sore disappointment. He came seeking fruit and found none.

II. *At whom did He marvel?* At the men of Galilee. He had been brought up among them, and they knew Him well. He had done *most* of his miracles there ; spoken *most* of his gracious words there. But He came to his own, and his own received Him not. No wonder that He marvelled.

III. *At what did He marvel?* Not at their sins, their blasphemies, their profligacies ; but at their unbelief. He did not marvel at the disease, but He marvelled at their rejection of the physician and his medicine ; not at their being lost, but at their refusal to be saved.

But why at their unbelief ? The unbelief of any poor sinner was a thing to be marvelled at,—how much more *their* unbelief ? Their unbelief of what ? His power and love ! Why ? Because,

(1) *It was so unreasonable.* He had done every thing

to remove or prevent it. He had given them the fullest evidence of his divine errand, and of the truth of his words. Their unbelief, then, was truly without a cause,—without excuse or palliation, altogether foolish. “If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me”?

(2) *It was so unkind.* He had gone out and in among them for so many years. He had spent and been spent for them. He had loved them, yearned over them, invited them; but they would not believe. He had raised their dead, healed their sick, given sight to their blind, fed their multitudes; yet they would not believe! How unkind!

(3) *It was so sinful.* To refuse the Son of God! To treat his miracles as if they were tricks, and his words as if they were lies, and Himself as if He were an impostor! Unbelief does all this. Must it not be the sin of sins?

(4) *It was so unprofitable.* They made nothing by it. It did them no good. It was a useless provocation of God, to say the least of it. It was like children preferring toys to gold. Oh the folly of unbelief! Oh its unprofitableness!

(5) *It was so dangerous.* It put away present peace and love. It made them miserable here. But it also treasured up wrath for them. It set God against them for rejecting his Son. It was the throwing away of everlasting life. It was the deliberate choice of hell for their portion. No wonder that he marvelled.

(6) *It was so wilful.* This sums up the whole. Their unbelief was a deliberate rejection of Christ and his Messiahship. They did it freely, of their own will and

choice, no one compelling. No wonder that Jesus marvelled at their unbelief !

1. *Sinner*, Jesus marvels at your unbelief. He wonders that you should prefer the world to Him ; death to life ; hell to heaven !

2. *Anxious soul*, Jesus marvels at your unbelief. It is your unbelief that is keeping you from peace ; and what reason can you give for it ? for refusing to believe the record ? Jesus marvels at your darkness,—your doubts,—your distrust.

3. *Backslider*, Jesus marvels at your unbelief. Unbelief is the root of backsliding. It is the evil heart of unbelief rising up again. He says, Return ye backsliding children, for I am married unto you.

4. *Believer*, Jesus marvels at your unbelief. For is there not more unbelief than faith in you ? With such a Saviour should you ever doubt at all ? O slow of heart to believe *all* that the Lord hath spoken. We believe but a little ; we are contented with that little. What different men should we be if we believed *all* ! All the things concerning *Him*, his first coming and his second !

XXXI.

CHRIST'S TEACHING THE WORLD'S GREAT
NEED.

"And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran a-foot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things."—MARK VI. 33, 34.

WE get here, first, a description of the people, and then of the Lord himself, in His dealings with them. Each word is descriptive and full.

I. *The People.*

(1.) *The people saw Him.* He was withdrawing to a desert place, beyond the sea of Galilee, for rest to himself and his disciples; but he could not be hid. He *might* have hid himself wholly; but he did not; he allowed himself to be seen.

(2.) *They knew Him.* They recognised Him. This is Jesus of Nazareth! Blessed recognition to them! Have our eyes seen him, and our hearts recognised him? Recognition of Jesus by the sinner! How much there is in that! It may be but a glimpse, but it leads to more.

(3.) *They ran a-foot thither.* They saw Him embarking near the head of the lake. They had no boat or boats to follow with; but they ran round the head of the lake

to get to the other side. It was quite a crowd, more than five thousand men, out of all the cities, flocking to Jesus. Blessed running; blessed eagerness, when Jesus is the goal!

(4.) *They outran and reached Him.* They were first at the spot. As they were going round the lake, they could easily see the spot whither he and his disciples were going. Thither they ran with all might, and reached the place before him. Blessed outrunning! Thus they reach Jesus, and crowd around him. Nor does he withdraw himself. He allows himself to be outrun and reached; for surely he could easily have outstripped them, as his was the shortest course, but he allows himself to be overtaken. He lingers for them. How willing to be reached! How accessible! How gracious!

II. *The Lord.* It is His *grace* that we find specially here.

(1.) *He came.* The "coming out" may be the coming out of the desert place to which he had gone for rest, or coming out of the boat in which the sea had been crossed. It matters little which, though probably it is the latter, as it would seem as if they had intercepted him on his way to the desert place. He came out! He did not hide himself; he allowed the crowd to meet him. He turns not away from any one, nor makes it a difficult thing to reach him.

(2.) *He saw.* His eyes lighted on the crowds that were gathering round him. It was no unwelcome sight, this "gathering of the people,"—earnest of the great gathering of the people unto Shiloh. He saw everything with human eyes, exactly as they were; and they made on him impressions such as they make on us, for he was

man all over, with human eyes and ears, and a human heart beating within.

(3.) *He pitied.* He was moved with compassion toward them. The sight of the thousands was to him touching and affecting. He could not but feel, for he saw through and through them, understanding their temporal and their eternal wants; all their hunger and thirst, of body and soul. He saw them as they were at the moment. He saw their eternal prospects. And he *pitied* them! With all their sins about them, he *pitied* them. The special thing at present which excited his pity, was their shepherdless condition. They were wandering sheep, with none to gather, none to feed them, none to guard them. It is a sinner's friendlessness, helplessness, forlornness, that awakens the pity of the Son of God. And that pity is sincere. He *feels* for the wandering sinner. He stretches out his hands to him; he says, "I would have gathered you." Oh the true, the profound pity of the Son of God! He, the great Shepherd, is touched with the scattered, weary, forlorn condition of his wandering creatures. He is "very pitiful." His "compassions fail not."

(4.) *He taught.* "He began to teach them many things." It was to this that his pity prompted him. He saw what they needed so specially. They were perishing for lack of knowledge. He knew what would bless them, what would cure and comfort them,—teaching, divine teaching. This is the soul's true cure. That which Jesus speaks is the cure of the soul. His words, his truths, are all we need. For in them is contained that which alone can heal all our diseases, and fill all our emptiness,—the

great love of God. Hence he said, "Learn of me;" for He has compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.

Yes, it is teaching that we need; the teaching of Jesus. He has "many things" to teach them; and all of them contain the heavenly medicine. His words are health, and rest, and food, and joy, and liberty. That teaching is all we need. Having it, we can dispense with self-teaching, or man-teaching, or church-teaching, or priest-teaching, or book-teaching. Who teacheth like him? Let us resort to him for the heavenly instruction which alone can profit. It is with him that we have to do for instruction,—“wholesome words,” true teaching. He is now in heaven, yet he teaches the multitudes still. He is as accessible as ever, as compassionate and condescending. His gracious words are still flowing down to us, for the health and joy of the inner man.

In these days, we need to keep this in mind especially. Amid the Babel of human words, and the contradictions of human teaching, let us resort to Him for the *one* teaching which profiteth. There is at present a tendency to turn away from him, and listen to others. Other teaching seems more intellectual, more learned, more eloquent, more “abreast of the age.” But what profits it? There is but one teaching and one teacher that can make wise for eternity.

The strong delusion is abroad. There is no remedy for it but the teaching of Jesus. The enticing words of man’s wisdom are misleading millions. Let us be on our guard, lest we too be led away by the error of the wicked. Satan

is working with his snares and sophistries, to deceive, if possible, the very elect. Let us close our ears against him, and listen to Jesus only. All other teaching is poor and vain. This only fills, and gladdens, and leads us to God.

The world has but *one* teacher after all. Jesus the Son of God. So also has the church. Only one teacher. He has wisdom ; others have only folly. This one teacher offers himself to us. Allow him to teach you, and he will ! Beware of the world's folly coming under specious names, —the verifying faculty, the higher criticism, spiritual intuition, advanced liberalism, enlarged views, emancipation from bigotry. Try the spirits, whether they are of God ; for many false prophets are gone out into the world.

XXXII.

JESUS AND HIS FULNESS.

"And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole."—MARK VI. 53-56.

WE may take up the topics of this passage in the following order : (1.) the landing ; (2.) the recognising ; (3.) the gathering ; (4.) the touching ; (5.) the healing.

I. *The landing.* They had been on the east of the Jordan, near Bethsaida ; they had taken ship and crossed the lake ; and now they draw to the shore of Gennesaret, which was a well-watered plain on the north-west side of the lake, where Magdala and other towns lay. It was no common landing this. History records many a landing,—of conquerors, liberators, benefactors, heralds of peace or war. But here is a landing which surpasses all. Wherever the Son of God landed there was blessing, peace, liberty, health. He carried all these with Him ; and wherever He landed He dispensed them. We may say that his first great landing was at Bethlehem, where He arrived from heaven. After that He had many a lesser

landing at other places ; and wherever his heavenly vessel touched, there He distributed its heavenly freight. He is still landing in our different cities and villages, and still dispensing liberally his rich stores of health. Wherever the good news are proclaimed there He is landing ; He is seen drawing to the shore ; nay, He is heard proclaiming his grace, and shews Himself as the distributor of pardon, and life, and blessing. For all fulness is in Him ; the fulness of divine love, and health, and joy.

II. *The recognising.* "Straightway they knew Him"; He could not be hid ; they recognised Him at once ; Jesus of Nazareth, the healer of the sick. It is specially *as such* they recognise Him here and now. It is not as the teacher but as the healer, that He approaches the shore of Gennesaret. No doubt He teaches also ; but specially He *heals*. The first thing He does is to *heal*. Their first felt want is the need of healing, and He does not despise this, but owns it, responds to it. It was then as the healer that they recognised Him, when He came on shore. They *knew* Him. This is the man we need ! Thus they met Him,—not as others, praying Him to depart out of their coasts, but as those who were eager to bid Him welcome. "If thou knewest," He once said to another ; and so He speaks to us. If thou knewest Him and his gifts, O sinner, wouldst not thou hasten to Him and partake of his fulness ? He comes to thee ; wilt thou not go to Him ?

III. *The gathering.* The news spread. The healer is come ! They run through the whole region round about ; they tell the tidings, they bring the sick. Where-

ever He goes in this region,—country, cities, villages,—it is the same. He goes to them ; they come to Him. The whole region is stirred. What a gathering ; what a time of healing ; what a casting out of evil spirits ; what a removal of disease from the land. The centre of the gathering is the Son of God. Here, as elsewhere, Christ is all. He is the great attraction for the sick and needy. They hear of Him, and they flock to Him, as was written of old, “To Him shall the gathering of the people be.” It was the want that was in themselves, and the fulness that was in Him, that was the reason for all this gathering. He had what they lacked ; and they came to Him for it. So round Him the publicans and sinners gathered, feeling that He had just what they needed. Thus sinners gather unto Jesus still. They hear of his grace and truth, of his love and his fulness ; they learn how He has been in the habit of receiving sinners ; how many millions have, in ages past, gone to Him and been blessed. They hear the report of what He is, of what He has spoken, of what He has done. They go to Him ; they crowd around Him ; they say, This is the Being who suits us, whom we need, who has all for us, who is willing to give us all. They make the discovery that distance from Him is the cause of all their want, and disease, and wretchedness. So they draw near. They form the one great universal circle of which Jesus is the centre !

IV. *The touching.* “They besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment.” It was nearness to Him, in any way, in any shape,—that they sought. Contact with Him,—nay, with his

garment,—nay, even with the border of his garment,—this was what they desired. He could have healed them at a distance, without a touch, by a word ; but He did not, that He might teach them that it is nearness to Him that is the thing so infinitely desirable ; that there might be no mistake as to where the healing came from. There are many ways of contact ; He looks on us, we look on Him ; He speaks to us, we speak to Him ; He touches us, we touch Him. It matters not which of these it may be. Only there must be contact or connection of some kind or other ; communication opened between us and Him. Then all his fulness flows out, and our want disappears. It is not some meritorious act of touching ; some laborious effort skilfully put forth. It is contact in any way. They who touched Him and his garment were not particular as to the manner. To touch Him was enough ! He does not stand on ceremony with the sinner, saying, Touch me in this way or that way, else you cannot be healed. All He wants is that you draw near and apply to Him. You will soon experience his welcome, for He is love ; grace and truth are in Him.

V. *The healing.* “As many as touched Him (or *it*) were made whole.” The cure was immediate, it was free, it was complete. No uncertainty, no failure. All who applied were received ; all who touched were healed. The medicine was all-efficacious ; the physician was all-skilful and all-powerful. Disappointment there was none, and could be none. The kind, or the virulence, or the obstinacy of the disease mattered not ; the healing power was irresistible. How much more healthy must Judea

have been during these years ! What an amount of sickness taken away ! We have the same healer still to deal with ; all his old skill, and love, and power. Time has not weakened Him, nor hardened his heart against our diseases and our sorrows. Our sins have not produced unwillingness on his part, nor placed us beyond his power as incurables. He is still the same. He receiveth sinners. He bids us come. "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

He does not now say to any one, "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended." He says rather, "Touch me, for I have ascended," as if the very fact of his ascension made Him more accessible, more easy to touch. Touch me, look to me, hear me, follow me,—these are some of his gracious words. Shall we remain afar off ? Shall we continue unhealed, unsaved ? He is in earnest ; shall we not be so ? He is disappointed if we do not come. He wants an opportunity of blessing us. We need Him, and He needeth us. Let us go to Him at once as the sick, the sinful, the weary, the sad !

XXXIII.

CHRIST'S RECOGNITION OF FAITH.

"And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way."—MARK X. 52.

THE Lord is going about on his errands of grace, as one whose heart was full of love, and his hands of blessing. He came, not to condemn, or to curse, or to smite ; but to pardon, to bless, to heal, to save. He has to do with body and soul ; with the soul specially, but with the body also, both for its own sake, and also to furnish out a type of that which is spiritual, both in the sickness and in the cure. He comes as the physician to the sick ; not with the balm of Gilead, or the skill of its physicians, but with the balm of heaven, and the skill of heaven.

Let us look at this sick one here, and his cure. We may learn much. The disease symbolizes something more terrible than itself ; a deeper darkness ; a sadder blindness ; a more incurable deprivation. To be blind to man and this world is sad ; but to be blind to God and to the world to come, infinitely sadder. Man has no idea of the terribleness of such a blindness ; a disease that shuts him out from all that is glorious, and beautiful, and divine. O blindness of the soul how terrible art thou ! Rendering us incapable of seeing and knowing God !

With thee what would heaven be to us ! Heaven without seeing God ! Let us mark,—

I. *The application.* Conscious of blindness, he longs for eyesight. Incapable of curing himself, despairing of cure from his fellow-men, he betakes himself elsewhere. Necessity brings him.

(1.) *He applies in the right quarter.* Quitting man, he comes to God. He has heard the fame of Jesus ; the cures that He has done ; and he concludes, this is the healer for me. He is one who can do what only God can do. He recognises the necessity for a divine healer. Such is the healer we need ; one who is divine ; who can do mighty miracles.

(2.) *He applies in the right spirit.* He has no promise to trust in, but what he has heard calls up faith. He comes in faith. He comes earnestly. He comes defying opposition and hindrance. He casts away his garment in haste. Earnestness, coupled with confidence in Jesus, —these are the feelings with which he comes. He knows exactly what he wants. He is in good earnest about the matter ; and he has confidence in Jesus. He will take no denial. He presents what Bunyan calls his “note of necessity.”

(3.) *He applies at the right time.* When Jesus was passing by. I would not say that any time can be a wrong time ; but there is truth in what Rutherford says, that a man is converted just “in the nick of time.” There is a *tide* of which it behoves us to take advantage. “Seek while He may be found ; call while He is near.”

II. *The reception.* It was just such as we should expect

from the Son of God ; just such as a sinner may still count upon. It was—

(1.) *Most gracious.* Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought ; when he comes He receives him lovingly, and grants his request at once. He does not keep him waiting. It is truly the grace of Him who said, “Come unto me.” He came without a promise ; but that matters not.

(2.) *Most satisfactory.* He got the very thing he wanted. He got it immediately. He got it without price or grudge. It was a full response to his appeal. He got good measure, pressed down, and poured into his bosom.

It was thus that the divine physician did his work on earth. It is thus he does it still. For he has carried up into heaven all his love, and skill, and accessibility. He waits for the blind soul ; He stands still ; nay, He commands him to be brought. We can use the words which the bystanders did to the blind man of Jericho,—“Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee.” Poor, blind sinner, rise,—come ! Make haste, throw away every impediment, carry your blindness to this heavenly healer. Trust Him for the cure. You will meet with as gracious and satisfactory a reception as did the blind man here.

III. *The effect of the cure.* He followed Jesus in the way up to Jerusalem. He did not return to his own house or friends, but at once attached himself to Jesus. The love of Christ constrained him. He could not remain behind ; he must follow. Thus gifts from the hand of Jesus attach us to his person. They form a link

between us and him. They are as a magnet to draw us. He followed Jesus; and so does each one whose eyes He opens. He follows Him in the way. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, and Bartimeus follows him thither. And thus we follow Him too,—to the heavenly Jerusalem, —his home and ours.

He did not say to the blind man, Follow me; yet he did it; love compelled him: he did not need a command. Unbidden the healed one follows; so follow we. He leads the way; we follow. Anywhere; it matters not where; enough if Jesus leads the way, though it be to the wilderness or to the cross. How much more blessed when it is to Jerusalem that He is going. Thither we follow Him; and there we shall abide with Him. He was on his way to the cross when the blind followed Him. It is not the cross now, but the throne and the glory. How eagerly and delightedly should we follow Him. He speaks to us and says "Follow me."

XXXIV.

THE FRUITLESS LIFE.

“*Nothing but leaves.*”—MARK XI. 13.

IT was the eye of the Son of God that searched this tree, and made this discovery. It must have been true that there was “nothing but leaves.” Man’s eye might be deceived ; his could not. That which He found barren must have been really so. No fruit could be concealed from Him. And He who searched the fig tree is the searcher of souls, and the searcher of churches. “I know thy works.”

He found *leaves*, but nothing more. Leaves are proper to the tree, but not the main thing. They are something, but not all ; nay, they are the least part of that for which the tree is made. They are ornaments ; they are shade ; they cover the bare branches ; they protect the fruit from the sun. But they are not *substitutes for fruit*. Leaves and *something more* would have been the thing. Not fruit without leaves, nor leaves without fruit. Leaves and fruit would have been the true condition. Leaves are necessary, but not for satisfying hunger.

It was the *hunger* of the Son of God that led to the discovery. He was “an hungered,” for He was truly man. He thought that on this tree He would find something to satisfy his hunger. It promised well at a distance ; and he judged of it at first simply as a man does

who sees a thing afar off. But the verdict against the tree is, "nothing but leaves."

(1.) *It is a remarkable description.* It is the least offensive way of describing barrenness. Everything is here but fruit. No exaggeration. This is Christ's simple description of a fruitless Christian. Nothing but leaves. Nothing to satisfy the hunger of the Son of God. Much that looks well ; but that is all. Nothing but words ! Nothing but *forms* ! Nothing but *profession* !

(2.) *It is an expression of disappointment.* It was a fig tree, not a fir tree ; it was not planted in the wilderness, but in a fruitful soil. There ought to have been fruit, for the harvest had not yet been gathered. Leaves are *promises*. As they wave in the wind, or glisten in the sunshine, they say there is fruit here. All Christian *profession* is a promise,—to man and to God. Christ comes to satisfy his hunger, and his verdict against the promising but fruitless professor is, "Nothing but leaves." This is the language of disappointment ; as in the case of God's vine in Isaiah (v. 4), or of the fig tree planted in the vineyard (Luke xiii. 6).

(3.) *It is a declaration of uselessness.* The purpose of the tree has not been served. It was made for *fruit*, and there is nothing but leaves ! It was planted in a fruitful soil, in one of the pleasant Bethany hollows ; but it bears no fruit. Nothing but leaves ! Then (1.) Nothing to do credit to any one ; to the gardener, or the garden, or the soil, or the owner, or the root itself. (2.) Nothing to be of any use to any one ; all a cheat, a sham, a mockery ; something for the eye, but no more ; a fair outside, but useless ;

not perhaps a white sepulchre, but a useless growth; a well without water; a pretence, an unreality, a falsehood. (3.) Nothing to satisfy the hunger of the Son of God; He craves *fruit*, not leaves.

(4.) *It is a sentence of doom.* Or at least it is preliminary to it. Nothing but leaves! Then wither away! Leaves and branches perish! This is the condemnation of the fruitless professor.

This fruitless fig tree is a *symbol*. Though a real tree on the Bethany road, yet a symbol: of Jewish unfruitfulness; of Christian unfruitfulness; unfruitfulness in the individual and in the church; words without deeds, or deeds that contain neither life nor love, and make the doer as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

It is simple *unfruitfulness* that is represented here, as in the fig tree of the vineyard. It is not corrupt or poisonous fruit; it is not immorality or even total death; nor the twice-dead tree; nor the cloud charged with fire; nor the star shedding baleful fire; nor the whited sepulchre; but simply *the absence of fruit*. It is form with some show of life; a tree with foliage, with sufficient sap to produce leaves and verdure; a profession sufficiently fair to excite expectation; a fair-promising Christianity, an excellent external religion. The class described here is not that of the profligate, the scoffer, the drunkard, the theatre-goer, the ball-attender, the card-player, the turf-haunter, the Sabbath-breaker; but the brisk religious talker, the bustling planner, the church-frequenter, the man of the committee and the platform. The professor depicted here may be found at our communion table,

among our elders, or Sabbath-school teachers, or visitors, or, perhaps, our ministers. He goes far ; he promises much ; he raises high expectations. Yet, after all, there is nothing but leaves ! Nothing but leaves ; then,

I. *Our creed is vain.* It may be excellent and sound ; without a crack or flaw ; orthodox, ancient, evangelical ; with Christ as its alpha and omega. It may be noble and venerable ; the creed of apostles ; the creed of primitive days ; the creed of the reformation ; the creed of all protestant churches ; the creed of our fathers, in which we have been instructed from childhood ; yet if it produce *no fruit*, it is vain. We may be most intelligent in our apprehension of it,—zealous in our appreciation, and defence, and propagation of it,—yet if we are without that which God calls fruit, which is the offspring of life, and love, and faith, we are but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. A man may say, “Lord, Lord,” and yet be shut out from the kingdom.

II. *Our religion is vain.* By “religion” I mean the whole of a man’s transactions with God ; his whole worship and service ; all the ways in which his creed acts itself out. If there be nothing of what God calls fruit, his whole religious life is vain ; all his religious acts, whether of devotion, or service, or benevolence, are vain. In him the whole routine of religion may be perfect and unexceptionable, and there may be no positive inconsistency to contradict this,—no irreverence, no neglect, no contempt,—yet his religion may be unfruitful. It may look well, and promise well, yet after all there may be “nothing but leaves.”

III. *Our Bible is vain.* We may read it intelligently, reverently, and regularly,—we may teach it to others, in the family, the Sabbath school, the Bible class,—yet it may profit nothing. It may be relished by us sentimentally or poetically, yet find no entrance into our conscience, no dwelling in our inner man. With our Bible in our hands and on our lips there may be no life. The Bible with all its glorious gospel may be in vain. That gospel itself may be in vain.

IV. *Our churchmanship is vain.* Zeal for a true church will not serve nor profit; it may sometimes cover lack of zeal for Christ. Love to a church and love to Christ are very different things. Churchmanship is not religion; it is not fruit, it is often mere “leaves.”

V. *Our faith and hope are vain.* What is faith if it does not shew itself in fruit? What is hope if it have no loving, living, practical manifestations? Let us see what is the nature of our faith and hope, lest after all we have “nothing but leaves.”

VI. *Our whole life is vain.* Not one part of it, but every part of it. All is unreal and hollow, beginning, middle, and end; the civil and social as well as the religious. It is one great unreality throughout; to bring forth nothing. All wasted! A mere show, or shadow, or piece of acting. How sad that our whole life should be vain! Nothing but leaves!

Woe to the fruitless! They have had all advantages, yet they bear nothing but leaves! Woe to the fruitless! The whole end of being is frustrated! Woe to the fruitless! Their whole course is a pretence, a falsehood!

If it be so for time,—then what for eternity? There is no possibility of improving the tree hereafter. No transplantation, nor grafting, nor pruning, nor digging hereafter. It is felled and given to the fire! Or put it in this way,—eternal barrenness! How awful, how wretched! Eternal unreality!

Even now the axe is laid at the root, in token of coming judgment; it will soon be lifted up; it will soon smite. So that, while pointing to the *cross*, we point also to the *axe*; while telling of the husbandman, planting, pruning, manuring, we must tell also of the same husbandman, examining, condemning, cutting down. Yes, the cross is *yonder*, but the axe is *here*.

Ah yes! these are awful words, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever! The curse of eternal barrenness! To be stripped of our green foliage as Adam of his fig leaves; to wither away! O fruitless sinner, bethink you of your doom. Bear fruit or perish! Fulfil your promise or wither away.

XXXV.

FAITH IN GOD.

“And Jesus answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God.”—

MARK XI. 22.

TWO things suggest themselves here, in connection with these words of the Lord: first, the command; and secondly, the reasons for compliance with it.

The command brings before us the obligation under which we lie to give to the God who made us, our entire and unreserved confidence in everything, great or small,—in regard to our own salvation, and in regard to every matter that comes before us; every duty that devolves on us, every plan that we form, every perplexity that overtakes us, every trial which comes down on us. Have faith in God. This is the Lord's counsel; nay, his command. “Have faith in God.” Not in self, not in man, not in churches, not in princes, not in intellect, not in gold, not in the creature at all. Have faith in God. Everything else is a broken reed, on which if a man lean it shall not only give way beneath him, but pierce him through with many sorrows. God's demand on us here, then, is for our complete and full trust, just as in the law his demand is for our absolute and undivided love. This is Christ's demand upon us in behalf of the Father. He had come to reveal the Father. He had day by day been revealing Him and shewing how truly he was entitled to

this confidence. He had himself set the example of trusting Him, and that in the most adverse and untoward circumstances in which a son of Adam was ever placed. And speaking to us as one who had faith in God, who had altogether trusted Him from the time that he was "made to hope upon his mother's breasts," he makes this solemn but most blessed demand in the Father's name and in the Father's behalf, "Have faith in God."

It is not, however, as if He were binding on us a burden; or issuing a new law, upon obedience to which life depended. In these words He is proceeding upon the great truth that the life has come,—that God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. He is claiming our confidence, not for a God who is yet waiting to see if we will fulfil certain conditions, and comply with certain terms, and obey his whole code of laws (modified or unmodified); but for a God who without waiting for anything in us, has of his own infinite grace, without one stipulation or condition, sent his only begotten Son into the world, with the gift of everlasting life in his hand for the lost sons of Adam. It is in behalf of this God that He is speaking; and it is by the declaration and exhibition of what this God has already done of his own free love, unsought by us, that he seeks to draw back our alienated affections from other objects, and to win our lost confidence from the worthless creature, to the infinitely worthy Creator,—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Have faith in God." Such is God's claim upon you now in his own behalf; such is the Son's claim upon you in the behalf of the Father. The

claim is made in the voice of authority, yet also of love. It is truly both. It is loving authority ; and it is authoritative love. He asks it without reservation ; and in a way which plainly indicates that the claim is one which admits of no rivalry. It is one which completely silences and sweeps away all competing claims, however venerable, however attractive these may seem to be. No divided heart ! No divided obedience ! No divided love ! No divided confidence ! There cannot be two Masters,—two Saviours, two Christs, two Gods. If the creature be God, let us give it our trust ; but if it be not, then woe to the man who leans on it. If the church be God, then let us give it our trust, that it may save and bless us ; but if it be not God, then woe, woe to the man whose trust is here. If the world be God, then let us trust it as such, and trust it for our all ; but if it be not, then woe, woe to the poor soul that gives to it that confidence which belongs to the living God alone.

In these days, when men are everywhere making or finding for themselves objects of trust, some in one thing and some in another, let us hold fast the words of Christ, "Have faith in God." In these days, when men are forsaking the fountain of living water, and hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns which can hold no water, let us take our stand beside the one living, infinite, everlasting well. There is nothing else that can quench our thirst for a single hour, or keep us from thirsting again.

"Have faith in God." This is meant to apply to everything ; for as there is nothing too small or common for

God to guide, or keep, or bless us in, so there is nothing too small for us to trust Him in. In things religious, things common, things domestic, things public, things national, things pertaining to the world,—let us have faith in God. The less of faith that there seems to be in the world, the more let there be in us. Nations do not trust Him ; let us trust Him (as it were) for them, and go carrying their case to Him on our faith, since they refuse to carry it on their own ! Statesmen and politicians do not trust Him ; let us trust Him for them, and take their cares, their burdens, their perplexities to Him, since they will not do it themselves. It was the friends of the sick man that had faith, and that brought him to the Lord. Their faith prevailed, and he was healed. The world has no faith in God ; few, very few, either rich or poor, have faith in God for anything ; let us make this a reason for having stronger faith, that we may carry the world's wants, and the world's sins, and the world's sore maladies to God. He will not overlook any case that is brought to Him by the hand of faith, whose faith soever it may be.

The world's great sin is not trusting God. Cursed is the man that trusteth in man. The world's great need is faith in God. Let us take up the world's case while we take up our own.

But let us ask the reasons for our compliance with this. Why are we thus urged to have faith in God ? What should lead us to this ?

(1) *There is Christ's command itself.* This of itself would suffice. As the Father's commandment is that we should believe on the Son, so the Son's commandment is

that we should believe on the Father. Christ here lays his solemn command on each one of you and says, "Have faith in God." He makes this explicit demand upon you on behalf of the Father. He knew what it is to have faith in God. It was one great part of his low estate on earth that He should live by faith upon the Father. This He had done in circumstances much more untoward, much more fitted to produce unbelief, much less calculated to cherish faith, than those in which you can possibly be placed. Having done this Himself, He turns round on you and lays His injunction on you, that you should do the same. More especially now, when He is gone up on high, should this command weigh with us. For who is there on earth to comply with it now, if His followers do not. He trusted in God when He was here, and He expects that now, when He is away, we should do what He did, and shew to an unbelieving, untrusting world, what it is to have faith in God. Christ's command then, enforced by His example, urges on us this duty. So that in declining it, or at least not complying with it, we are refusing to obey one of the most explicit injunctions ever laid on man. Often we hear it said that it would be presumption to trust God thus implicitly, and that we have no warrant to do so. No warrant! You have much more than a warrant; you have a command which cannot be mistaken. Presumption! How can it be presumption to obey a command? Is it presumption in you to keep the Sabbath, or to refrain from taking God's name in vain? It is presumption *not* to trust, not to have faith in God,—it is the worst of all presumptions, the presumption of

refusing to obey a divine command,—a presumption which nothing in or about you can possibly justify or extenuate.

(2.) *God's own character demands this faith.* It is not enough to say that God's character warrants and encourages us in this faith; we must say that it demands it. For less than this is a refusal to recognise God's character as He has made it known to us; it is in having faith in Him that we make the true and proper recognition of God as the God of all grace. To withhold this faith or confidence, is to say that God is not such a being as the Bible represents Him to be; not such a being as warrants our trust, or affords us reason for having faith in Him. Now, we know that God has revealed to us his name and character. That revelation exhibits Him as altogether trustworthy; altogether such an one as invites the sinner's confidence. Nowhere in scripture is there any light cast upon God's character which has not this tendency. Nowhere has He done or spoken anything which would repel our advances to Him, or would inspire suspicion or distrust. All his words bear one uniform testimony to his character as the gracious Jehovah,—forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,—thrusting none away, but sincerely inviting all; reproving men for standing aloof, but upbraiding none for drawing near; discouraging none, but most kindly encouraging all; sending out messages of welcome the most generous, and loving, and honest, that ever proceeded from the most loving and large-hearted of the children of men. Christ Jesus was Himself the exhibition and embodiment of this gracious

character. He could say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." He that saw the grace of the Son, saw the grace of the Father. He that heard the Son say, Come, heard the Father say, Come. He that saw the Son dealing with sinners, saw the Father dealing with the sinners. And thus revealing the Father and the Father's grace; pointing to Himself as the expression of the Father's mind and heart; making known in every way both by word and deed the Father's mind of love, He could say, with urgency and with authority, "Have faith in God."

(3.) *God's gifts claim and warrant faith.* That we are still on earth, not in hell, is of itself such a pledge of grace as to bid us, even the ungodliest, have faith in God. The suspension of the law's righteous sentence against us, even for an hour, is a manifestation of mercy on the part of God, which, even in the absence of all positive gifts, is enough to shew us how thoroughly we may trust this God. When, however, He adds to this the gifts which are thrown all around us, like the manna round the tents of Israel, He gives us something more direct and positive to rest upon. That this earth should be so green and these heavens so blue; that these flowers should be so fair and these streams so clear; that this body should be kept in health in spite of disease and death around; that there should be so much of comfort here, and so many intervals of ease and joy, even in such a world of sorrow; and that all this should be vouchsafed to the unthankful and the unworthy, to those whose rightful portion was the ever-burning lake,—surely all this is an amount of free

gift which invites our fullest confidence. These gifts can have no meaning at all, if they do not mean that God's desire is that we should thoroughly trust Him. He who gives so much to sinners unasked and undeserved, is surely one who wishes us to trust Him, and who is well entitled to our confidence. But above all these other gifts, there is one which says to us, in a way that cannot be mistaken, have faith in God. It is the gift of his beloved Son. That gift has but one meaning. It is not capable of being interpreted save in one way, and that way is one which leaves us in no doubt either as to God's desire for our confidence, or as to our duty in this matter. If after hearing of this gift we still continue doubtful or distrustful, it is plain that we either altogether question the fact of God's having given his Son, or we wilfully put a false construction upon that deed, making ourselves believe that God did not really mean the love which that gift so gloriously reveals.

(4.) *The way in which we specially honour Him is by having faith in Him.* As the special revelation which He is making of Himself is that of grace, so it is by our recognition of this that we honour Him; and it is by our non-recognition of this that we dishonour Him. Faith in Him is just the recognition of his character as the Lord God merciful and gracious, and want of faith is our refusal to recognise Him in this character. It is then by faith that we honour Him, and it is by unbelief that we dishonour Him. He has sent forth his gospel for the very purpose of calling forth your faith, and so obtaining from you this honour. Shall we then withhold it under

any pretext whatsoever? Surely nothing can justify our refusal of this honour? It is vain to speak of its being presumption in such as you to trust God assuredly. You might as well say it is presumption in you to love Him, or to honour Him, or to keep his commandments. The greatest and most daring of all presumptions in the world is that of refusing Him the special honour which He so specially claims,—the honour of being trusted by the sinner. And when you think that in this world there are almost none to give Him this honour, when you think that the millions of earth are with one accord denying it to Him, will you not feel yourself under irresistible obligations to testify against such unbelief and such dishonour, by giving Him your unreserved faith, and so bringing to Him the honour which He so specially and so earnestly desires at your hands?

(5.) *Unbelief profits nothing.* There are some sins that profit the sinner for a season, so that by reason of this profit or pleasure he persists in indulging them. Covetousness profits the lover of gold for a season, by giving him earth's riches. Gaiety profits the lover of pleasure for a season, by making him happy while the vanity lasts. But what does unbelief do for us? It does not comfort us or make us happy. It does not secure for us any blessing, either earthly or heavenly. It does not bring forgiveness or give us peace with God. It does nothing for us,—absolutely nothing. It has it not in its power to do anything but make us miserable. The more you indulge in it, or allow it to have the mastery over you, the more evil it does you, the more wretched it makes you. It has

nothing in itself to recommend it ; and it has nothing in what it does to overcome its nature and intrinsic hatefulness, or to make it seem desirable, or excellent, or profitable in your eyes. It is evil, only evil ; it is unprofitable, wholly unprofitable ; its fruits are only darkness and sorrow. It weakens, but does not strengthen the soul. It wounds, but does not bind up. It poisons, but does not heal. It saddens, but does not comfort. It darkens, but brings no light. And as is its sorrow, so is its sin. It is the sin of sins ; and all the while we are indulging in it we are not only making ourselves uncomfortable, but we are committing sin of the darkest colour and malignity,—sin which is the very root and source of all other sins.

(6.) *Faith has done wonders in time past, and it can do wonders still.* The whole Bible is a record of the marvels which have been accomplished by faith ; and the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews is a summary of these marvels. God has taken great pains to shew us what faith can do ; and our Lord when on earth taught the same blessed truth without ceasing. We seem to hear his voice saying to us, not once, but constantly, Have faith in God ; for what is there that faith cannot achieve. It is faith that brings us into connection with Omnipotence, and it is faith which makes use of that omnipotence continually. By faith we engage Omnipotence on our behalf. By faith we make use of the Omnipotent arm, so that by it we are enabled to do mighty signs and wonders ; there being nothing too much for us to expect, even as there is nothing too great for God to do. It may be as difficult

as tearing up the mountain by its roots, and casting it into the sea, yet even a thing so difficult, a marvel so great as this, shall be done. Is anything too hard for God? Is there anything which He is unwilling to perform for those who trust in his arm, and cast themselves upon his grace?

Is it the revival of God's work in yourself or in your land that you desire? Have faith in God. Tell Him your desires, and tell Him in confidence.

Is it the conversion of friends that you are bent on? Have faith in God. Put your case in his hands wholly, but do so believingly, not as one thinking it impossible, or supposing that He can be unwilling, but as one perfectly assured of his love and power.

Is it the removal of temporal difficulties and perplexities that you are concerned about? Have faith in God. Trust Him with them all. You cannot remove the briars and thorns with your own hands, but He can; and if faith asks Him, He will.

Is it the state of the nation or the world that troubles you? Have faith in God. It is his world, not yours, and he must be far more concerned that things go right than you can be. Only He expects that his believing ones should bring all these things before Him. He is waiting for your faith, to do great things for your land, and great things for your world. Have faith in God. He will yet do great things for earth. He will smite Antichrist; He will bind Satan; He will restore Israel; He will sweep off the evil, and bring in the good; He will make all things new, and set up the glorious kingdom of His Son.

Look beyond the cloud, and the storm, and the night. Trust Him with this earth's future, and trust Him with its present. Live as men who believe that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth ; that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. HAVE FAITH IN GOD.

XXXVI.

WATCH AND PRAY.

“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.”—

MARK XIII. 33.

THERE is a threefold exhortation here in reference to the coming of the Son of Man ; (1.) take heed ; (2.) watch ; (3.) pray.

I. *Take heed.* Or “look ;”—look about you ;—have your eyes on the alert ; mark every object,—persons and things ; let nothing escape your notice. A Christian is not to close his eyes and see nothing here. He is left here that he may both see and hear. And out of every sight and sound he is to extract something that will profit, quicken, stimulate, sanctify. What he sees each hour as he goes out and in ; what he hears in conversation, or reads in books and newspapers ; all are to furnish materials for his growth. But perhaps the special reference in the expression “take heed,” is to the previous discourse concerning the signs of his coming. Keep your eyes open to these. Understand what is passing day by day ; interpret events ; connect them with the coming of the Son of Man. You see false Christs ; you hear a Babel of opinions ; you mark the new forms of immorality and infidelity ; you are startled with the bold assaults made on Scripture, and on the Christ of God, on his blood, and cross, and righteousness ;—connect all these with the

coming of the Lord ; interpret them as signs of the last days ; do not treat them as common things ; do not close your eyes upon them ; do not be indifferent to them ; do not admire them as tokens of intellectual development and human progress. Understand them all according to God's purpose and mind. Examine them in the light of apostolic teachings and warnings. Be not deceived concerning them. Beware of the strong delusion. "In understanding be men."

II. *Watch.* Keep awake. Be not like the virgins who all slumbered and slept. Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober. How often was that word "watch" upon the Lord's lips ! His apostles took it up in their epistles ; and in the Apocalypse the Lord resumes it,—"*Blessed is he that watcheth.*" There is a tendency to slumber. As the disciples, both on the transfiguration hill and in Gethsemane, fell asleep, so do we in the most solemn circumstances and times. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak. The atmosphere of earth seems loaded with slumberous vapours. This present evil world exercises a soporific influence ; Satan, its god, the prince of the power of the air, does all he can to lull us asleep. It is a struggle to keep awake. Hence the necessity for the solemn and startling words "awake," "arise," "watch." Be ever on your guard, as sentinels at their post ; as watchmen on the towers of some beleaguered fort ; as seamen navigating some difficult stream with windings, and sand banks, and rapids ; or as servants sitting up at night to wait for their master's return. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, WATCH."

“Be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” In the midst of a heedless world and an unwatchful church, how needful the perpetual warning, “Watch.” And all the more as we see the day approaching. The more that we see a world “sleeping;” or wasting its hours in vanity, and pleasure, and lust, and gaiety, the more let us feel the necessity for resisting the wide-spread influence and keeping awake. “Let us not sleep as do others.”

III. *Pray.* “Watch and *pray* that ye enter not into temptation.” He spoke a parable that men ought always to *pray* and not to faint. “The end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober, and watch unto *prayer*.” Prayer is the attitude of a helpless, needy man; whose only refuge is in God. No help *within*; no help *from man*; only help in Jehovah’s omnipotence;—that is the meaning of prayer. Prayer is always needed; most in days of evil and trouble. Do we feel our need of prayer? Do we know what it is to pray? Do we delight in prayer? Do we pray in faith? John Welch’s knees were hard with his constant prayer,—are ours in danger of becoming so? “Pray much,” said Alexander Peden; “it’s praying folk that will get through the storm.”

(1.) *Pray for our own needy selves.* Nothing but prayer will keep us steadfast, or enable us to grow, or make us more than conquerors.

(2.) *Pray for the needy church of God.* God has a church, and will have a church everywhere on earth; but in some ages that church is low and barren; more earthly than heavenly; her light dim; her step feeble;

her strength small. It is so now. Pray, then, for a needy church, that in all these respects God would visit her; raising her up; reviving her; re-kindling her light; re-invigorating her strength, re-adorning her with all gifts and graces; re-clothing her in apostolic raiment, and sending her forth to do his work with the old power and success of primitive days.

(3.) *Pray for a needy world.* It is blind, and knows it not; poor, and thinks itself rich; foolish, and thinks itself wise. It is doubly needy. It is not aware of the extent of its ruin, and alienation, and depravity; not alive to its danger and hopeless prospects; not anticipating its doom. There is a hardening, and searing, and blinding process going on in connection with "modern progress." The men of earth now are like the Antediluvians in the days of Noah; like Sodom, on its last day before the judgment came; like Pompeii, ere the volcano poured its torrents of fire upon it; like Babylon, in the night when Cyrus seized it; like Babylon the great, in the day of its pride. Oh, pray for a needy world! Not merely for its civilisation, or its reformation, or its intellectual and moral elevation; but for something deeper and more decided than these; something without which morality, and literature, and intellect will profit nothing; something without which its science, its eloquence, its wisdom, its music, its proficiency in the fine arts, will not avail.

Our Lord's reason for all this is solemn,—“Ye know not when the time is.” The “time” is that referred to in the previous verse; the unknown and untold hour of

his arrival. It is this great event that forms the urgent reason for taking heed, for watching, for prayer. He is coming! We know not when. He is coming! It may be soon. This is no time for carelessness, or sleep, or prayerlessness. Church of the living God! up from thy bed of sloth; to thy knees; watch and pray. Man of God, enter into thy closet,—plead with all thy might.

O heedless sinner! wilt thou not awake? Arise, call upon thy God. Betake thyself to the great refuge.

XXXVII.

THE MASTER COMETH.

“For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.”—MARK XIII. 34-37.

WORK and watch! Watch and work! This is the substance of this parable. The message comes straight from Christ’s lips; it comes to *us*; it seems specially meant for us in these last days. Let us arrange it thus:

I. *The house.* We may, in one sense, call this the earth, in another, the visible church on earth. The scene of the parable is evidently laid here, and concerns men dwelling here. It was here that He himself came to abide: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” His tabernacle was then with men.

II. *The householder.* It is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This world is his by creation and by inheritance. He is proprietor of the estate; possessor of the house. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him. He came unto his own. “Christ as a Son over his own house,” says Paul.

III. *The journey.* He has gone to another land, like

the nobleman who went to the far country to receive the kingdom. Here the object of the journey is not stated, for the parable is complete without it. He wishes to shew the state of the house in his absence ; and his regulations for the household when left to themselves. For the condition, order, behaviour, &c., of servants in the *presence* of the master, is one thing, and these in his *absence*, quite another. There is room for *eye-service* in the one case, but not in the other. The time of absence is one of *testing*. Faith, love, obedience, fidelity are tested. The present dispensation is the testing-time for men,—specially for the church.

IV. *The servants.* All who are occupied with the management of Christ's affairs are his servants. They are expected to do the Master's will, and to work the Master's work. In one sense all men are his servants. He created them to work his work ; and hence He speaks to them as such. He speaks to all kings and rulers throughout the earth as those from whom service is expected. But specially are the members of his church engaged for service. Frequently does He give them this honourable name. He has called them to a *kingdom*, yet also to *service*. Kings, priests, friends, brethren, and servants, are the names he gives them. Serve the Lord, is his message to each member of his church. For each Christian is a servant of this household ; and each one who *calls himself* a Christian says, "Christ is my Master, and his work will I do, for I am his servant."

V. *The charge.* Our translation, "authority," conveys less than the Greek implies. The master summons the

servants, tells them of his intended absence, and gives them charge of the house,—devolves its responsibilities upon them, so that they shall feel the master's absence even more influential than his presence. They were to act for him, to represent him, to conduct the affairs of the house in his name. How great the responsibility of the master's absence ! Even more solemn, more urgent than his presence. The servant is put upon his honour, his right feeling, his conscientiousness. Instead of being rendered more careless by the absence, he ought to be doubly diligent and conscientious.

VI. *The individual work.* To each one his separate work. As each member of the body has its own office, so has each servant of the household his separate work. The eye cannot act for the ear, nor the foot for the hand ; so can no servant do the work of another. There is work enough for all, and each has his own. It is for *our own* that we are responsible, and for no more. This should check ambition, and envy, and disappointment. Each servant has his own work, which no one can do for him. Let him do it well.

VII. *The command to the porter.* As he leaves the house he gives special command to the gatekeeper, to *watch*. The servants are inside, the porter at the door. His special duty is to watch.

1. *Watch against thieves and robbers.* This is one of the main purposes for which he is there. He frightens away the enemy, and he warns the inmates against his approach.

2. *Watch for the master.* Be ready to receive him ; to

open the gate to him ; to give notice to the inmates ; at whatever hour he may come. It is taken for granted that it will be some *night* hour ; like the bridegroom at midnight.

Ministers of Christ are specially the porters. To them the command is, *Watch*. To all it is given ; but specially to them. They watch *for others* as well as for themselves. In the master's absence, enemies, thieves, robbers will come,—watch. “Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about.” Watch, the master may come at any time ! Be ready, on your own accounts ; be ready, for the sake of others. Sleepy servants are evil ; but sleepy watchmen are worse. Behold he cometh ! Behold I come as a thief !

XXXVIII.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN.

"And Jesus said, I am : and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."—MARK XIV. 62.

THIS is at once a confession, a prophecy, and a warning. It is Christ's confession, Christ's prophecy, Christ's warning.

I. *Christ's confession.* Art thou the Christ? asks the High Priest. "I am," He answers. It is a confession of his Messiahship and Sonship; a "good confession" (1 Tim. vi. 13); it is a bold confession; it is a public confession; it is a confession before Israel, before Israel's High Priest. It is the summing up of all his mighty deeds and words, and the true interpretation put upon them. "I am He." Ere Israel rejects Him, they are first to hear his open and direct avowal of Messiahship. He has not yet borne witness before the Gentiles. That is to come. It is now before "his own"; and they are the foremost to condemn Him. They are waiting for Him; yet when He comes they will have none of Him. Is this confession responded to by you? Do you say, Amen, thou art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? If so, blessed art thou, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it; and he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. But if not,—how great thy guilt, how terrible thy doom!

II. *Christ's prophecy.* It is a prediction of his second coming. It must have seemed strange to the High Priest to hear Him in the hour of weakness and condemnation proclaim his coming and his kingdom. Yet what more suitable? He had just before announced that event to his disciples; now He does so in the midst of his enemies. Behold, I come! I come to judge, I come to reign. Let us mark the predicted circumstances of this advent. They are all of them in keeping with his name, Son of God, and with his character and office, Messiah.

(1.) *It will be a royal coming.* He comes as King; King of kings, and Lord of lords. Throne, and crown, and sceptre shall then be his.

(2.) *It will be a judge's coming.* He comes to judge,—to sit upon the solemn seat of judgment,—acquitting and condemning; executing judgment on his enemies.

(3.) *It will be a conqueror's coming.* He comes from heaven with his mighty angels. He comes for victory and triumph. He comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah.

(4.) *It will be an avenger's coming.* That shall be the day of vengeance; when He rises in his wrath to break his enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel.

(5.) *It will be a public coming.* Every eye shall see Him. As the lightning shall it be. All kindreds of the earth shall mourn. In the clouds of heaven.

(6.) *It shall be a glorious coming.* In great power and glory shall it be. The angels with Him. His saints with Him. Invested in glory. Glorious in his person, his raiment, his retinue.

(7.) *It shall be an unexpected coming.* When men are not looking for Him,—not wishing Him. Sudden as the thief. Without preparation, it shall burst upon the world. “Behold, I come quickly.”

Yes, the Son of God shall come! Not to be judged, but to judge! Not to hang upon a cross, but to sit upon a throne! Not to be smitten, but to smite! Are we looking for that day?

III. *The warning.* Christ evidently speaks these prophetic words as a warning to the High Priest and his fellows; as a warning to his enemies, whether Jew or Gentile. How terrible shall that day be to the unprepared! Like the flood of waters, like the fire and brimstone from heaven. It shall be the day of darkness, and death, and doom!

Be warned! The time is short, and the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Be warned, for the signs of that coming are multiplying. Oh, make sure; make sure of everything connected with eternity and the kingdom. Have you secured salvation? Have you taken refuge in Christ? Or are you hesitating and halting? Do you not know what your hope is, or whether you have any hope at all? If the Lord come before you are ready, where will you be?

XXXIX.

THE GRACIOUS ONE AND HIS GRACIOUS WORD.

LUKE IV. 16-31.

LOOKING at this scene generally, we notice three outstanding points : (1.) The grace of Christ ; (2.) The sovereignty of God ; (3.) The pride of man. But in connection with these there are several others which fall to be noticed.

The place is Nazareth. The scene is a Jewish synagogue. The actors are (1) the Son of God and (2) the congregation of Jewish worshippers. Christ is not a stranger here, they know Him well, for He has been brought up among those hills of Galilee. Here He began his ministry ; and it might have been expected that his first sermon in a place where He was so well known would have been welcomed.

The scene consists of two parts,—the sermon, and the remarks of the hearers,—and then the strange events that followed up the sermon. The sermon is just like the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The grace of Father, Son, and Spirit is here. It is the gospel of the grace of God that comes from the speaker's lips. The hearers wonder at the gracious words. The first impression is good. But the wonder dies away ; the admiration passes into cavil : "Is not this Joseph's son?" Can we listen to the carpenter, the son of the carpenter? This

is the sermon-scene. It brings out the narrowness of the human heart, and shews the folly of those who say that were the genuine truth but presented to man, he would receive it. Here was the best discourse ever preached,—no error either in word or doctrine,—full of grace,—the very gospel,—and that from perfect lips,—yet man only wonders, and cavils, and rejects. What proof of our need of the Holy Spirit in order that we may believe. That Spirit could have taken out the stony heart from these Nazarenes, and made them receive instead of rejecting Christ's sermon ; yet he did not put forth his power, even though the Son of God was the preacher. And why ? Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.

But let us look at the after-sermon-scene, which brings out these points more fully.

I. *Man's thoughts as to Christ's work.* Man does not indeed at first speak. It is Christ that reads their thoughts and interprets their question, "Is not this Joseph's son ?" The unbelief that lay at the root of it He brings out. They were seeking a sign. They wanted miracles. Do your Capernaum wonders here ! Heal your own fellow-townsmen ! Thus their unbelief scoffed. But more. They wanted to direct or manage Christ's work ; to tell Him where and how to work ! They would have Him take *their* advice. If He works at Capernaum, and not at Nazareth, He is acting unfairly ; shewing partiality ; He is respecting persons and places ! Vain, proud, selfish man ! He would be God ! He would control and manage Christ !

II. *Christ's answer.* (1.) Ye would not receive me though I did work miracles here. My whole life among you has been one long miracle of holiness and love, yet ye despise it, and ask for more! Ye would not honour a prophet who was one of yourselves. Ye want some unknown worker of miracles from afar! Such is man's heart as interpreted by the Son of God. (2.) God is sovereign. He selects persons and places according to his own good pleasure. He selected Sarepta, and He chose Naaman, passing the cities of Israel and the thousands of other lepers. For He does what He pleases. He cures some, and passes by others; He does miracles at one city, and not another; He heals one leper, but not another. Is He, therefore, a respecter of persons? This is the language of infidelity and blasphemy; of men who say God has no right to rule according to his will. He does not indeed respect a rich man because he is rich, nor a king because he is a king; but He does choose one and pass by another. He chose Israel, not Egypt; Jerusalem, not Babylon; is He therefore an unjust respecter of persons? He chose David as his king; He chose a Sidonian widow; He chose the Syrian captain; is He a respecter of persons? Is He not entitled to do as He sees best? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

III. *Man's anger.* They were filled with wrath, and rose up to slay Him! Their anger was kindled by this solemn assertion of God's sovereignty. They thought they had a *right* to blessing. The Lord denied this; and shewed them that sovereign pleasure of the infinite Jehovah on which all creation hangs. He gives or takes;

kills or makes alive ; wounds or heals ; as it pleases Him. It is He who makes one man, or one nation, or one city to differ from another. Britain has the Bible, China has not. So God has willed. Spain is in the darkness of Popery, Scotland in the light of Protestantism. Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. He doeth according to his will. Behold He breaketh down, and it cannot be built again. He openeth, and no man shutteth ; shutteth, and no man openeth. The deniers of God's sovereignty cannot account for any of the differences that exist on earth. They must maintain either universal perdition or universal salvation.

Few things make man so angry as the assertion of God's sovereignty. It was so in the case of Christ. Why ? Because it prostrates him, and makes him feel wholly in God's hands.

XL.

HEALTH IN JESUS.

"And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."—LUKE VI. 19.

JESUS is here the centre of a great crowd from all parts of Palestine. They have heard of him, and they flock to him. His words and deeds attract them. He has what they want; so they gather round him. The scene teaches us such lessons as the following:

I. *There is health in Jesus.* He came from heaven with all the health of heaven in him; health, like sunshine, flowing out irrepressibly; health of every kind; health without measure; health inexhaustible. The balm of the mountains of Gilead might wither down and die out; this heavenly balm could not; it was like the leaves of the tree of life, never falling, ever growing and ever green. The physicians of Gilead died, till none was left; this physician dies not. He is the everlasting Christ, the Son of God. All health, and skill, and kindness are to be found in him; for not only is He perfect man, but very God; nay, and the fulness of the healing Spirit without measure dwells in him.

II. *There is sickness in us.* We are sick, nigh unto death; sick in body, sick in soul; the whole head sick, the whole heart faint; our wound incurable by man; our hurt grievous. It is sickness pervading our whole system;

sickness accompanied with pain and weakness ; with sorrow, and sadness, and heaviness of spirit. It prostrates the body and clouds the mind. We may cover it over, but it is still there. We may soothe with anodynes and administer sleeping draughts, but the disease is unremoved. We may deaden or drown the pain in worldliness, or business, or vanity, or lust, but the mortal malady is still working in every part. O deadly disease of sin ! what a world hast thou made here,—what an hospital, a lazaretto, a city of the plague ! O pains of earth, not temporary or occasional, but constant and abiding ; fore-runners of the eternal pain, the eternal sickness, the eternal agony and woe.

III. *Contact with Jesus heals.* The medicine must be taken ; the physician's hand must touch us ; we must in some way or other come within the circle where the divine virtue is flowing out. It is indeed the Holy Spirit that applies the remedy ; but he does so by bringing us within this healing circle, by making us touch Him who is the divine treasure-house of health. There was no healing for Israel without looking at the brazen serpent ; so there is no healing for us without the look, the touch that brings us into contact with Jesus. It is not a clasping or embracing, but a touching ; a touching even the hem of his garment ; a touching *his shadow*, as in the case of Peter. Such is the resistless efficacy, the irrepressible virtue that is lodged in Him. And as we are healed by touching, so our health is continued by our *continuing to touch*. It is to be a constant touching ; a life-time's contact ; nay, an eternal contact. Thus is our new health begun

and prolonged. Does this seem a hard thing? A hard thing to be *always* in communication with Jesus; to be *always* under the shadow of the tree of life; to be always on the brink of the crystal river of the New Jerusalem. If some think it hard, they shew that all is yet wrong with them; and that it is sheer necessity and force that is bringing them to entertain the thought of contact with Jesus at all. Should we call it a hard thing to be daily obliged to breathe the fresh air and bask in the glorious sunshine? Is it a hard thing to be obliged to eat that we may be fed, or to sleep that we may be refreshed? Is it a hard thing for the friend to be in company with the friend, or the parent with the child? Is there not among multitudes who call Jesus, Saviour, a feeling that they would rather only use Him in times of great necessity, but at other times have the fellowship of every one in preference to Him? But the disease that brings us to Him keeps us at his side. There is no health away from Him; neither is there joy. We come for the cure of our pain, but we find this only a small part of what we obtain from him. We find *all* in Him; and so we hold Him fast, and will not let Him go. It is our very life, our very joy to remain in contact with Him.

IV. *This health and this contact are free to us.* There is no fence around Him to keep us off; no guard to forbid or warn us away. Any one, every one may come at once to be healed. It is the sick, not the whole, that he invites. It is the leper, the palsied, the fevered, the blind, the lame, the deaf, the devil-possessed, that he bids welcome to. On every side we may approach Him. At

any time, and in any way, we may come. Whatever be the length or the deadliness of our disease, we may come. The physician is divinely skillful ; the medicine is free ; the cure is certain.

Health for sick humanity ! Medicine for a diseased world ! A Physician for a dying race ! Such are the messages which we bring. All of them overflowing with God's great love to sinners ; to sinners simply as such. The depths of divine compassion are infinite. So are its heights. God's pitying love takes in the worst sinner that ever breathed the air of earth. Wide as earth ; wide as the bounds of sin ; wide as the evil of human hearts ; wide as heaven ; wide as His own infinite heart ; such is the pitying love of God.

XLI.

MUCH FORGIVENESS, MUCH LOVE

LUKE VII. 36-50.

THIS is a feast of worldly hospitality on the part of Simon; probably little more. It does not look like the table of a believing, loving man; but of a hospitable Jew, who, puzzled, perhaps curious, about the character and claims of Jesus, is anxious for an opportunity of closer and freer intercourse. The expression in the thirty-ninth verse, "if he were a prophet," seems to indicate some such state of mind,—an oscillation between faith and unbelief.

Simon, though inviting Christ, has not been over-kind to his guest. "Thou gavest me no water for my feet." He has shrunk, too, from all expression of intimacy, all acknowledgment either of friendship or of discipleship. "Thou gavest me no kiss." He withholds the token of festal gladness. "Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint." Simon is evidently not at home with the Lord; nor does he wish to be thought at home with Him. Whatever might be his anxious questionings of soul, he is still "one of the Pharisees." He is no disciple.

The Lord knew his heart and understood his invitation; yet he went to his house and sat down at his table. For whether it were Pharisee or publican, Simon or Matthew, that invited him, it mattered not. He went wherever he

was desired, like the physician in a city of pestilence, putting himself at the disposal of sinners, and turning his footsteps in the direction of their varied needs. Nor did He take offence at the incivility of Simon in not washing his feet, or anointing his head. He mentions these afterwards, to humble his pride; but He is not affronted thereby; for he ever acts and speaks as one who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"; not to be served by any, but to be the servant of all.

The four following things are brought out in this narrative: (1.) The sinner's approach to Christ. (2.) Christ's reception of the sinner. (3.) The Pharisee's interference. (4.) Christ's rebuke and judgment.

I. *The sinner's approach to Christ.* It is not enough that she knows that a prophet has arisen, and that the Son of God has come. The report of others will not do. She must see and hear for herself. It will not do for her to stand afar off; she must draw near.

(1.) *She comes earnestly.* She must get at Him. She must encounter difficulties; she must brave scorn and sneers, and the risk of being thrust out; for she is "a sinner"; and the house of a Pharisee is the last place she would think of going to. But she is in earnest. She will not be hindered. Access to this wondrous man, whom she has heard of as the forgiver of sins, and the friend of sinners, she must have; and what are the taunts or jests of Scribe and Pharisee to her? True earnestness breaks through every barrier.

(2.) *She comes directly.* She makes use of no mediator or messenger. She brings her own case in her own hand,

and approaches him directly. She comes just as what she is, and as nothing else. She does not come as what she may be, or hopes to be, or is making herself to be. She does not come with excuses or palliations, but with *confessions* only; and He is her one confessor, and this is her one confessional. She deals *directly* with Himself; for the sinner and the Saviour must meet each other face to face; both just what they are: the one the sinner, the other the Saviour.

(3.) *She comes trustfully.* She may not yet know Him fully; but she knows something of Him, and of his grace; and that something is enough to call up her trust. She "trusts, and is not afraid." Man may look coldly on her; Jesus will not. Man may thrust her out; Jesus will not. She has few else, perhaps none, to trust; but she has Him, and it is enough. What she knows of Him, and of his love, removes all misgivings. She believes; but it is not in her faith, but in Jesus that she trusts. She weeps; but it is not in her tears that she confides. She repents; but it is not on her repentance that she builds. She loves, but it is not on her love that she leans. She trusts in the Son of God. She trusts Him for what He is. She has already learned something of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, for her sake became poor.

(4.) *She comes thankfully.* She comes to shew her love,—her grateful love. She brings her precious ointment; she brings her tears; she brings her kisses; she brings her reverence; she brings her thanks,—thanks not the less true and warm because uttered not in words, but

in deeds. Her sin, and his love to the sinning one ; her unworthiness and his overflowing grace ; her outcast condition as far as man is concerned ; her admission without upbraiding into the presence of the Son of God, —these are the things that call up gratitude. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” are the words which we seem almost to hear from her lips as she kneels behind his couch, kissing and anointing his feet.

Thus it is that the sinner draws near with the “true heart” to the Son of God. Her knowledge of Him is very imperfect as yet ; she has not yet realised all the glory of his person, nor known his coming death and resurrection ; but she knows enough to give her confidence, for she sees his grace towards the sinner, and understands that he came to seek and to save that which was lost.

II. *Christ's reception of the sinner.* In the scene before us, it is his reception of one who is in unqualified phrase, even according to man's judgment, A SINNER, that is shewn us. She is not one of the best of sinners, but one of the worst ; without goodness, or merit, or recommendation. She has nothing to prepare or qualify her ; nothing to make her less unworthy to stand before the Holy One. Just as she is she comes ! And how is she received ?

(I.) *Immediately.* She is not kept waiting for a moment. The Son of God does not hold her in suspense ; does not bid her go and come again ; does not send a message telling her to wait a little outside and make herself more meet for a reception. He receives her immediately ; yet in a way which does not make light of

her past sin, or lead her to forget who and what she is. Ah, yes! It was *immediate* reception which the Lord gave her; and it is *immediate* reception which he still gives to each coming one amongst ourselves. He does not stand on ceremony with us, nor repel us, nor, either by word or deed, give one sign of reluctance to receive us. As the Father the prodigal, so He receives his returning wanderers with wide arms, seeing us afar off, and running, and having compassion, and falling on our neck and kissing us.

(2.) *Frankly*. "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly (or freely) forgave them both." The forgiveness was the free gift of love; a love which the many waters had not quenched nor the floods drowned; a love which had survived years of sin, and ungodliness, and lust, and vanity; a love which, now meeting its object face to face, can no longer restrain itself; but like Joseph on the neck of Benjamin, gets vent to its long pent-up yearnings, in forgivenesses and blessings, as frank, and free, and generous as they are unearned and undeserved. Man's love of man is according to merit, or expectation of response; God's love of man has no reference to deserving or to return. Man's love of man is contracted, exclusive, and grudging; God's love to man is as boundless as it is free. He forgives without condition; He loves without reserve; He blesses without measure or end.

(3.) *Without upbraiding*. There may be immediate and frank reception; yet afterwards there may be reproof and upbraiding. Not so with the Lord. Man's forgivenesses may be compatible with upbraiding; but the

forgivenesses of God are too large, too generous, too free, to admit of this. As He "giveth," so he "forgiveth,"—"liberally, and upbraideth not." He does not bring up the woman's past life to remembrance. He reminds Simon of his unkindnesses; but He has no such reminders for the woman; He has not a word of upbraiding for her. He shews us in her case what He means when He says, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

III. *The Pharisee's interference.* Simon does not feel comfortable in the midst of this scene. He does not like the sinner's free approach, or the Lord's free reception. He finds fault with both. The root of his interference is his idea of how a prophet or religious man ought to act, and of how a sinner ought to act. In other words, it was on *religious* principles that he would thus object to what was going on, and would step in between the Lord and the sinner. The basis of his religion was man's goodness, not man's sinfulness; and his idea of reconciliation between God and the sinner was that of a compromise on both sides; the two parties meeting each other half way; man improving himself in moral and religious feeling, and so doing his part; God abating somewhat of his awful righteousness, and modifying the stern integrity of law, so as to give man a chance of reaching Him by a little exertion and strictness of life. The basis of what God calls reconciliation is altogether different. It assumes that God must come the whole way to meet man, and that that meeting must be as truly one of highest righteousness as of deepest love on the

part of God. God takes man as he is, simply a sinner, "without strength," and without goodness. He does not ask man to meet him half way between earth and heaven; He comes down all the way to earth in the person of his incarnate Son. He does not resort to half measures, nor is He content with half payment. He comes down to man in absolute and unconditional love; without terms or bargains; himself paying the whole price, and thus leaving nothing for the sinner but to accept the frank forgiveness which his boundless love has brought.

Of these things the Pharisee understood nothing. Wrapt round with his own religiousness, and merit, and goodness, his prayers, and fastings, and tithe-givings, he could not enter into the mind of God, nor comprehend the nature of his love to sinners, his way of forgiving and receiving the guiltiest. Hence it is that, in his thoughts at least, if not in words, he steps in between the sinner and the Saviour. He would blame *both*.

(1.) *He blames the sinner.* He thinks she ought to have been more respectful, more distant. He does not like the idea of a well-known sinner coming into his house without invitation, and kissing the feet of Jesus without asking permission. He sees in this step, an undue and unwarrantable boldness; the taking of a liberty with this reputed prophet, such as she should have been the very last to take. He does not understand how a sense of need draws the sinner irrepressibly into immediate contact with the Lord. They who have not known their sin, nor felt their need, may hesitate, or stand at a respectful distance; but he who has realised his own sin and need cannot thus keep

aloof. He must go at once to the Son of God. Let self-righteousness forbid him, and formalism frown upon him, he cannot stay away from Christ any more than can the prodigal from the arms of his father. Men may say this is too free, too direct, too simple, too easy ; and blame him who thus acts ; but if ever they come to know their own need, they will feel that nothing else would do but this.

(2.) *He blames the Lord.* He demurs to this manner of treating the sinner. Can he who does this be the Son of God ? Can he be even a prophet ? He either knows or does not know that the woman is a sinner. If he does not know, he is no prophet ; and if he knows, he is acting most inconsistently with his character and office. He ought to have kept her at a distance ; to have refused to allow such liberties, and to have reprovèd her for being so bold. As the Scribes and Pharisees at another time did, so Simon does here. He murmurs. What ! Be so kind to a common sinner ! What ! Allow a profligate to kiss his feet ! This is trifling with sin, and countenancing the sinner. Thus man blames God for his love,—at least for its freeness. Were it love bought or deserved, he would say nothing ; but it is love to the undeserving, love to the guiltiest ; this he cannot away with. This frank, and free, and immediate forgiveness is something which his religion abhors. But let man's religion turn away from God's free love to the sinner ; still this is God's way. His thoughts are not our thoughts ; his ways are not our ways. High as heaven is above the earth, so high are his thoughts of grace and blessing above all our thoughts and ways.

IV. *Christ's rebuke to the Pharisee.* He defends Himself ; He defends the woman ; He reproves Simon. Assuming Simon's ground, that he was much less a sinner than the woman, He still reasons with him as with one who professed to have received forgiveness to some extent. Both needed forgiveness ; and the question was thus one of more or fewer sins ; not one of sin and no sin. Look then at the fruits. On the one hand you have the fruits of one who knew that she had sinned much, and had been forgiven much. These were overflowing love, gratitude, and reverence. On the other, you have the fruits of one who thought himself a man of far fewer sins, and therefore needing fewer pardons. They are so scanty that they cannot be named. No washing of the feet, no anointing of the head, no kiss of affection,—no manifestation of love at all ; bare worldly civility and hospitality,—no more. It was as if Christ had said, Look at the fruits of the woman's pardon, and look at yours ! How different ? What warmth in her, what coldness in you ? What love in her, what indifference in you ! To you I am nothing ; to her I am all. You have given me your table and your house ; she has given me her heart and soul.

Simon's religion was founded upon the idea of needing little forgiveness ; of so making up for past sin by a strict life of ritualism, that when the day of settlement came between him and God, the balance against him might be very slight. He judges himself by this ; and he judges the woman by this. He has few arrears to pay off ; she has a fearful amount. Should both be treated in the same way ? Should Christ shew as much favour to the one as

to the other? Christ shews him the fruits of this false idea, this self-exalting religion ; and bids him judge of himself and of his religion by these. Man may think well of him, and of his prayers, and alms, and sacrifices, by means of which he hoped to pay off his debt ; but what could God think ? How could God look upon a religion that led to no love, no gratitude, no fond allegiance of the soul ? God can do without our sacrifices and services, but he cannot do without our love.

The religion that is founded upon the idea of few sins and a small forgiveness,—a trifling debt, and man's power to pay it off by a good life,—must lead to little love ; for by it we are made more debtors to self than to God ; nay, we are hardly debtors to God at all. The religion founded upon the truth of man's utter evil, and his need for infinite pardons, must lead to much love ; for it makes us wholly debtors to God, and to his frank, forgiving love. When pardon is to be bought or deserved, there can be little love, if any ; when it is wholly undeserved and unbought, coming straight to the sinner from the free love of God, there must be much love ; love in return for love ; the pardoned sinner's full-hearted love, responding to the mighty, the stupendous love of God ! Oh, if we would learn to love God, let us do full justice to the love of God to us.

XLII.

HOW MUCH MORE !

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children ; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?—LUKE XI. 13.

THE Bible is not only a revelation *from* God, but it is the revelation *of* God ; of his mind, his heart, his whole character. It is given us for the purpose of leading us to place our trust in Him, drawing us to Him, removing our suspicions, rooting out the evil heart of unbelief. “They that know thy name will put their trust in thee” ; “how excellent is thy loving-kindness, therefore the sons of men shall put their trust in the shadow of thy wings.”

Here the earthly parent and the heavenly parent are brought before us, for the purpose of shewing us the confidence which we ought to place in the latter. The argument rests on the natural confidence which the child has in its father’s bountifulness ; and runs thus, “If in spite of all the drawbacks arising from a naturally evil being, a narrow heart, and limited love, an earthly father is trusted ; how much more should our heavenly Father be trusted, in whom there are no such drawbacks ?”

The argument of the whole passage turns on this. Ask, seek, knock ! You shall not, cannot fail ! If a son ask bread, will his father mock him by giving him a stone ? That cannot be. If a fish, will he be so cruel as to give

a serpent? Far more impossible! If an egg, will he present him with a scorpion? Much more impossible and incredible. No parent, however unnatural, would do any of these. If impossible with men, how much more so with God?

There is here both a comparison and a contrast; a likeness and an unlikeness between the earthly and the heavenly; and it is on this that the argument of our text turns.

The comparison is just this: If an earthly father will give his son what he asks, how much more our heavenly Father? For our heavenly Father is truly what his name indicates, "*Our Father* in heaven." That name is no *figure* when applied to him. The figure is all the other way. It is far more *real* when used in reference to Him than to any other. In all the others it is a *figure*, in Him it is *real and literal*. He has all a Father's heart and feelings; he made that heart, and knows what it is, and what is in it. That human heart is formed after the model of the divine. Our parental feelings tell us what his are; our yearnings shew us what his are. And then he knows, if one may say so, what are a father's responsibilities,—to provide for his own. He made us, and will He not support us? will He not bless us? As a father is the source of blessing to his children, so is God.

But we have specially to mark the contrast or difference between the earthly and the heavenly parent. For the point of our text turns more especially on this. It is from this that we get the force of the "how much more."

I. *Earthly parents are feeble, He is almighty.* He has all a father's ability, and far more. He is always full,—

full to the uttermost ; He can always afford to give, and is always able to do for us. His is the fulness of omnipotence. How irresistible the argument of our text !

II. *They are ignorant, He is wise.* They do not know *what*, or *when*, or *how* to give. His mode of giving is wise ; his skill is infinite. He commits no mistakes in giving. His is a *wise* giving ; He knows our wants ; He does not give at random.

III. *They are easily provoked, He is longsuffering.* A father needs patience in dealing with his children ; and love lends him patience. But his patience is not inexhaustible. It wears out. He is at times provoked. Not so with God. His patience is infinite. He can put up with affronts, and bear coldness ; always ready to give when asked, whatever the past provocation be.

IV. *They are changeable, He changes not.* Even the love of earthly fathers does not exempt them from frailty and caprice. They are fickle ; giving and refusing according to their mood or temper. He changes not. His feelings, his mode of acting and giving remain the same ; without variableness or shadow of turning.

V. *They are often perplexed, He is never at a loss.* Their resources are limited, and they sometimes know not what to do. He is not harassed or distracted by the number of petitions and petitioners ; never bewildered, never at a loss, because of the variety of the wants of his vast family. He can give to each case as much attention as if He had no other to care for. His hand, his heart, his mind are large enough for all.

VI. *They are but imperfectly happy, He is the blessed One.*

Our giving depends much on the state of our minds at the moment. When depressed, we have no pleasure in giving; we either refuse, or we give merely to get quit of the applicant. Darkness of mind shrivels us up, makes us selfish, neglectful of others. When full of joy, giving seems our element,—our joy overflows in this way; we cannot help giving; we delight in applications; we seek opportunities of giving. So with the blessed God. Being altogether happy, his delight is to give; his perfect blessedness flows out in giving. We can never come wrongly to such an infinitely happy being. He teaches us by his own example, that it is “more blessed to give than to receive.”

VII. *They cannot be always giving, He can.* His heart and his treasure are inexhaustible. Their past gifts are no pledges for future ones; his are; *all* his gifts; specially his beloved Son. We count upon the future because of the past. What will He not give!

We have but to open the mouth; to stretch out the hand. There is no unwillingness on his part. All is love. Asking is not *unnecessary*; it is the expression of dependence, the attitude of creaturehood. But he loves to give,—freely,—to all. Let us come boldly to the throne of grace.

XLIH.

JESUS WATCHING FOR SINNERS.

"This man receiveth sinners."—LUKE XV. 2.

SUCH was the conclusion of the Pharisees respecting Jesus, from what they saw of his daily life. Between Him and them there was mutual repulsion, as if not suited for each other; between Him and the publicans there was mutual attraction, as if exactly suited for each other. It is *sinner*s that this man receiveth. He does not care for the righteous. He passes them by.

Were these Pharisees right or wrong in their conclusion? They were *right*; and the parables which follow are meant as both an admission and a vindication of our Lord's proceedings. He accepts their interpretation of his life, as the true one, the only true one; and He proceeds to furnish the key, the divine key to what appeared to so many unaccountable. He gives the solution to the difficulty raised by the Pharisees in his days, and continually resuscitated and re-stated in other ages by the descendants of those Pharisees, self-righteous men.

Thus those men, who hated Christ, preached his gospel. We must call this "the gospel according to the Pharisees." They meant it not; yet they spoke the true gospel when they said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

The word "receiveth" is in the original singularly

expressive. It means waiteth, watcheth, looks out for, lies in wait. It occurs fourteen times in the New Testament; and in all other places it is translated in some such way : as Mark xv. 43, "who *waited* for the kingdom of God"; Luke ii. 25, "*waiting* for the consolation of Israel"; ii. 38, "*looked for* redemption in Jerusalem"; xii. 36, "men that *wait* for their Lord," Acts xxiii. 21, xxiv. 15, Titus ii. 13, Jude 21. Jesus is looking out for sinners! Paul waited to receive all who came to him (Acts xxviii.) ; but Jesus *goes out* in search for them. He lies in wait for sinners ; for Marys, and Matthews, and Zaccheuses. Let us see (1) what this lying in wait implies ; (2) how He lies in wait.

I. *What it implies.* Many things ; all of them favourable to the sinners, for He does not lie in wait as the lion for his prey, but as the Shepherd for his stray sheep. It implies then—

(1.) *Love.* Indeed otherwise it has no meaning. The three parables which follow indicate this. It is love, tender, compassionate, forgiving love, that is the main-spring of this waiting for sinners.

(2.) *Patience.* As the huntsman or the fisher waits patiently hour after hour to seize his object, so does this waiting, watching Saviour. Unwearied patience with the uugodly, the wandering, the hard-hearted, the profligate, marked his life on earth ; and He is still the same patient one in heaven. "He hath long patience."

(3.) *Earnestness.* He is intent on his object ; thoroughly in earnest. His patience is not indifference ; his love is not mere good-natured benevolence. It is all

earnestness with Him. It was so on earth ; it is so in heaven.

(4.) *Desire to bless.* His direct and honest object is blessing. He longs to bless. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He longs for their life. "Oh that thou," are still his words to the sinner. "How often would I have gathered you," He says with profound sincerity to every lost one.

II. *How He does it.* His life on earth is a specimen of how He does it. His days and nights were spent in seeking the lost. By the sea of Galilee, in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, on the highways of Judea, in the synagogue, in the temple, in the village, in the city, by Jacob's well, He was seeking the lost. How does He do this now ? How or where is He lying in wait for sinners ?

(1.) *In the word.* Of that word He is "the spirit," the Alpha and Omega, and out of that word He speaks to us. From Genesis to Revelation we hear his voice. It is the voice of love. "Come unto me" is the burden of the Old Testament as well as of the New. It is not merely that each chapter speaks of Jesus ; but in each chapter Jesus speaks to us. In each verse He is lying in wait for us.

(2.) *In sermons.* For sermons are not disquisitions, nor declamations, nor orations, but messages from Christ. In them we hear God and Christ beseeching men to be reconciled ; ministers, in speaking Christ's gospel, "pray men in Christ's stead." Thus each Sabbath He is looking out for sinners ; stretching out his hands from the pulpit to them.

(3.) *In providences.* What a meaning there is in that word providence when used not a substitute for God, but as a word to denote his doings! In each providence, great or small, private or public, personal, or family, or social, or national, or universal; in mercies or in judgments; in wars, famines, pestilences, shipwrecks, railway disasters; in the seasons, in the sunshine, in the storm; in all, Christ is lying in wait for sinners; out of them comes his loving voice.

Thus Christ lies in wait for sinners: not merely waits in his house to receive them, but watches for them, looks out for them, goes out in quest of them. The expression is beautifully applicable to the three cases in the parables which follow. The Shepherd is looking out and going out for his sheep; the woman with her lighted candle is going through every room, turning over all the lumber, and looking into every nook, for her piece of silver; and the father is watching at the door for his wandering son. Ah, "this man lieth in wait for sinners."

Yes; in his work of saving, Christ is *aggressive and compulsory*. He goes out in order to find them. He is ever on the outlook. He does not merely sit above on his throne, willing to receive the applications of those who come. He comes down amongst us. He goes to and fro in the earth; He walks up and down in it. His daily, hourly work is going in quest of sinners.

His doings *on earth* imply this; his words as well. It is the same in heaven. His doings from Pentecost onwards to this hour imply this. Every soul saved shews this. His words spoken after He left earth intimate

this. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," implies this.

Thus we are compassed about with love. For the lost, there is the *compassionate* love ; for the saved, there is the *complacent* love. We cannot escape from it whatever we be. It follows us, pursues us, cries after us, surrounds us ! Why the love of an *almighty* heart should ever be ineffectual is a mystery beyond our power to solve. But for all this the love is the same ; sincere and true.

XLIV.

GOD'S JOY OVER THE RETURNING SINNER.

"Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."—LUKE XV. 10.

LET us not overlook the words with which this statement is introduced, "I say unto thee." He speaks as the faithful witness ; testifying of what he knows ; what He has seen and heard in that heaven whence He came.

It is of a *sinner* that he speaks,—a sinner such as those who were now gathered round the Lord,—a publican, a profligate, a harlot ; not some worthier sinner, but one of the worst. He wishes the Pharisees to understand the feelings of God above to these sinners below ; to see that God's thoughts were not their thoughts. Whatever earth might do, heaven took an interest in them. The "religious" ones of earth might turn away ; the holy ones of heaven did not.

It is of a sinner's *repentance* that He speaks ; of that mighty change whereby old things pass away, and all things are made new. It was to produce this change,—this change of the whole inner man,—this total renovation of being, that the Son of God came. He came to "call sinners to repentance."

It is of *one* sinner that He speaks ; not of multitudes ; so that no one may think that it is the *number* that is the occasion of his statement. It is *one* sinner ; one of these

poor publicans that He thus so graciously holds up to view ; it is one poor fragment of lost humanity, despised by all else, that He here declares to be the object of his own and of the divine compassion. So was it always in his life here ; one woman of Sychar ; one woman of Tyre ; one Zaccheus ;—thus He declares his interest in individual souls. He cares for *each*.

But it is specially of *the joy* which the Lord speaks of that I ask you to think. It is not simply pity or love, but joy.

(1.) *It is joy in heaven.* There is always joy there, but sometimes it swells up and overflows. On the occasion of the event referred to, there is peculiar joy,—an outburst of unrepressible gladness in that glad and glorious heaven which the presence of God fills.

(2.) *It is the joy of God.* It is He himself who is thus represented as rejoicing. The joy is in heaven ; and it is the joy of God himself ; the joy of the Shepherd on finding the lost sheep ; the joy of the woman on finding her lost silver ; the joy of the father on finding his lost son.

(3.) *It is joy in the presence of the angels of God.* As the shepherd and the woman call together their friends and neighbours, so God calls his heavenly hosts. In their presence He utters his joy ; and He calls on them to rejoice with Him. He is full of this joy of love, this joy at recovering the lost, that He must have them to share it with Him. There is something in this representation of the divine joy that brings it very close to us, as it makes it so like our own in its way of manifestation.

How like ourselves is this way of dealing with his joy and getting vent to it, and making others partakers of it. Is it not a strange truth this, that the infinite Jehovah should need, and should ask for, the creature's sympathy in his joys? How like that infinite heart must be to ours! How near to us does this bring the Eternal One!

From all this we learn much; chiefly such truths as the following:—

(1.) *The knowledge in heaven of what is going on here on earth.* How far this extends we cannot say. It refers here only to what concerns the great redemption-scheme; and even as to that, the knowledge is only that which is directly communicated by God, when He has something special to announce. But heaven knows this at least: that there is such a place as earth; that it is full of God's lost property; that God loves it; that it is not hell; that salvation is there, and that God is every day getting hold of some lost one there. Intelligence is constantly going up to the heaven of heavens; and God is making known so much of it as suits his purposes of sovereign wisdom and grace. Probably, they do not know all; but certainly they know what is fitted to augment their gladness, and call forth their songs.

(3.) *The delight which God has in saving.* This is manifest from the pains He takes about this; the perseverance and long-suffering; the patient endurance of rejection and hatred;—and all this in the desire to rescue the captive, and to win him back, heart and soul, to himself. He seeks and saves “with his whole heart and soul” (Jer. xxxii. 41). He loves to bless; and when He has

blessed, He rejoices over the sinner to whom the blessing has come. As the father receives the prodigal, so does the great Father receive his wanderers; calling all heaven to join in his song over them, "This my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."

(3.) *The appeal which He is thus making to the sinner.* No appeal could be more forcible than that which is thus made by the great love of God,—the overflowing joy He has in saving. Wilt thou continue in sin, and rob both God and the angels,—yea, and thyself too,—of such a joy? All heaven would rejoice over thy salvation, and wilt thou not be saved? Wilt thou persist in wandering, in worldliness, in ungodliness? Art thou determined to be lost when God is so bent on saving thee?

(4.) *The encouragement thus held out to the returning sinner.* Look at all the three parables! Is there one word of discouragement? Does not each of them say, Come? Is God not bidding thee welcome, stretching out his arms? What joy it would give God to pardon and to bless thee! What a song would be sung in heaven over thy repentance and return! Shrink not back; turn not away; be not afraid, the gate is open, and thy God stands beckoning thee in.

What a comment is this verse on Christ's tears over Jerusalem! His sorrow was sincere and true; so is his joy in the day of the sinner's return. His tears were real and genuine; so are his songs. All is real, both the sorrow and the joy.

What a force does this passage throw into such words as these: Ye will not come to me; him that cometh to

me I will in nowise cast out ; if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink ; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

What a great thing must salvation be ! And what an important and precious object must a sinner be ! So much love, so much sorrow, so much seeking, so much joy in connection with him !

XLV.

THE FATHER'S LOVE.

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."—LUKE XV. 20.

IT was hunger, not love, that drew the prodigal back to his father. There was no high nor disinterested motive in his return. He stayed away as long as he could ; he only came back when he could not help himself. It was not the thought of his father, but of the plenty of his house, as contrasted with his own want, that led him out of the far country to seek his father's face. So with the sinner. It is want, misery, danger, not love nor any noble motive that lead him to seek the face of God. How foolish the thought of those who would shrink back from God because they have not come to Him with a pure and disinterested motive ! But it is with the Father that we have now specially to do. (1.) Paternal watchfulness and far-sightedness ; (2.) paternal haste ; (3.) paternal compassion ; (4.) paternal tenderness ; (5.) paternal reconciliation.

I. *Paternal watchfulness and far-sightedness.* "When yet a great way off, his father saw him." He had doubtless been watching ; "this man *looketh out* for sinners." How quick-sighted is the paternal eye, made keen and clear by the yearnings of the paternal heart. The figure

seen thus far off was no doubt very unlike his boy ; it was one of rags, and filth, and disfigurement. Yet it is recognised. There is my son at last ! Poor wanderer, God's eye is on you in yon far land of famine. He has not forgotten ; He has his reasons for not coming out and taking you back by force, like the shepherd the sheep ; for He wants your heart, and that cannot be won by force or gold, yet He is on the outlook for you, however far off you be.

II. *Paternal haste.* "He ran." The son was coming to him, yet he ran to meet him, eager to shorten the distance. He did not keep state or ceremony. He did not think of what might comport with dignity or with offended authority ; he did not wait nor move slowly towards him ; he *ran*, as if every inch of distance or moment of separation were intolerable. What eagerness to meet did that haste imply ! What heedlessness of all ceremony ! No fear of seeming too eager, no thought of thus encouraging sin, or making the prodigal think lightly of his wickedness. Haste was the best for the prodigal, as well as most congenial to his own feelings. What a rebuke does that word "ran" furnish to those who think that a sinner can come to Christ too soon ; can be reconciled too quickly. God runs, sinner, to you, will you not run to God ? He makes haste, oh make you haste.

III. *Paternal compassion.* "He had compassion." It would seem as if the pity were stirred by what he saw. The nearer he came the more he had compassion. The rags and filth, instead of repelling him, only awoke still more his pity. Instead of turning away from the loath-

someness, his paternal heart was moved by the sight of it. As we read that Jesus, when He *saw* the multitudes, was moved with compassion, so was it with the father here. Poor wanderer, you need not then try to cover your rags, or to hide your filth, or to try to make yourself more like what you were in order to attract your father. It is just *that which you are* which excites his compassion. Your wretchedness, ignorance, defilement, squalor, will be no obstacle. They awake his pity. Go to him then just as you are, and see if his compassions are not infinite. Whoever and whatever you may be, He pities you. The tears of Jesus over Jerusalem are the expressions of that pity,—sincere, and true, and deep.

IV. *Paternal tenderness.* “He fell on his neck.” So was it when Jacob and Esau met; Joseph and Benjamin. Falling on another’s neck is the expression of tender love,—love that, for the moment, cannot express itself in words, but buries its face (and with it, past grief and present joy) out of sight on the neck of the beloved one. Ah this is tender love! He fell on his neck! It is the tender love of God. Yet all these manifestations of human love, these tokens of family endearment, are poor to express his unutterably earnest yet tender grace. In listening to God’s gospel we too often feel as if it were the mere intimation of his *consent* to our salvation, implying but a cold willingness to save us from hell. How much we mistake. His is true parental fondness, pity, tenderness, yearning; his is the eagerness to bless us, which words cannot express. Yes, God is in earnest in his tender love.

V. *Paternal reconciliation.* “He kissed him.” This is

is the completion of the whole—the consummated and manifested reconciliation. There is the kiss of affection,—Jacob kissing Joseph's sons ; the kiss of sorrow,—when the disciples fell on Paul's neck and kissed him ; the kiss of reconciliation,—when Jacob and Esau kissed, and when righteousness and peace are said to kiss each other. How much is implied in that paternal kiss,—love, joy, pardon, pity, reconciliation. Thus God comes up to the sinner with the fulness of reconciliation in his heart. He does not stay to be entreated, or pleaded with, or persuaded. He hastens up to us, and embraces us in the fulness of his heart. Ah, this kiss is the seal of pardon to the prodigal ; and it is this kiss that He is longing to imprint now on your polluted lips ! He comes up to you with the reconciliation of the cross ; for He is reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.

XLVI.

GOD'S FREE LOVE.

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet."—
LUKE XV. 22.

THERE is among many a secret *dread* of the gospel in its freeness. They may not deny that freeness, but they shrink from it as dangerous, if not pernicious. There is among others not so much a dread as a *distrust* of that freeness. They hesitate, for they are not sure but that freeness may be abused ; and they take precautions, as they think, by a long and deep preliminary law-work to place the sinner in circumstances in which he will not abuse the gospel ; as if they knew better than God what these circumstances are, and as if any circumstances, any convictions, any law-work could prevent the sinner from abusing the gospel ; or as if the gospel itself did not contain within itself, in its own good news, the best safeguards against abuse. They do not deny it ; but they do not give it fair play ; so modifying, circumscribing, clogging it, guarding it, that it ceases to be good news to the sinner *as he is*, convinced or unconvinced, penitent or impenitent, sensible or insensible.

These words of the parable rebuke all such unworthy ideas of the gospel ; as if it could be made more free ; as if it could not guard itself ; as if its sanctifying power did

not lie in that very element of *free love* which it contains, and which some dread as the destruction of all holiness.

The distrust of a free gospel is the reflection of the old spirit of the Pharisees ; the modern arguments against its freeness, are a mere reproduction of the old self-righteous murmurings of the Scribes. And the answer to all this is contained in the parable of the lost son. No doubt some of those who heard Christ's words cried out, How dangerous such statements, how prejudicial to the interests of morality, how fitted to encourage laxity, how certain to end in backsliding ! Nevertheless these are the words of the holy One, of Him who is true as well as holy, and who spoke these words for us as well as for the publicans and the Pharisees of old.

It was misery, poverty, hunger, straits, that brought the son to the father. No high, pure, holy motive. He comes as he was, with nothing about him but evil. He speaks few words ; and these are simply the declaration of what he was. Yet he is received at once. He had no promise, no message, no encouragement. He had never heard of such a case as his before. But he ventures ; he makes an experiment.

Not so with us. We make no experiment. We undertake no venture. We do not come unbidden. We are invited and besought. We have a thousand promises of reception and proclamations of free love. We have heard of, and seen multitudes go in before us. What a gospel is that which we have to go upon ! So free ; so full of love ; so rich in promises !

I. *There is here the difference between man's thoughts and*

God's thoughts. Man despises, God pities ; man hates, God loves ; man repels, God attracts ; man rejects, God receives. God's thoughts are love, and longsuffering, and paternal patience, and pity. The Pharisee speaks out man's mind, Jesus speaks out the mind of God. And what a difference ! As heaven is above earth, so are God's thoughts above man's.

II. *The difference between man's ways and God's ways, between man's treatment of the sinner and God's.* This difference has many aspects, and comes out at many points. But let us take that of our text : "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." Here is God's way, God's treatment of the sinner. It is the treatment of love. It assumes that the sinner is all in rags and filth,—half naked ; and that God must deal at once with this wretched condition. It does not assume any previous preparation, or preliminary treatment. God must take him as he is ; deal with him as he is ; not that the sinner must deal with himself, or fit himself, or wait, or work, or amend ; but that God must take up his case just as it stands.

(1.) *The robe.* He came for food, not thinking of his rags ; hunger made him forget all else. But the father sees his nakedness, and at once removes it. Clothe him, he says. There is a robe for him. Ask not whether he is worthy of it ; he is in rags ; let him be clothed at once.

(2.) *The best robe.* There were different robes in the house : for the servants, for strangers, for the eldest son. Would these not do for him ? If he must be clothed, any robe will do for such a wretch. So man would have said. Not so God. There is hardly a robe in the house good

enough for him. He must have the *best*. The best robe for the vilest son. What love is here. What delight in loving and in blessing! We poor prodigals must be gloriously clad! Not sackcloth, nor cast-off raiment, nor a servant's dress; not Adam's nor an angel's righteousness; but something better than all,—the robe of Jesus!

(3.) *Bring it forth.* He must have it at once. He is not to go in search of it. It must be brought out to him. On the spot; just *where* he is and *as* he is, bring it out, bring it to him. Out of the wardrobe bring it; select the best, the very best, before he moves another step, that he may enter the house even better clothed than when he left.

(4.) *Put it on him.* It is not, "Give it to him, and let him put it on himself"; but, "Put it on." He has but to stand still and allow himself to be thus clothed and blessed. He does nothing. He does not need to do anything. Love does it all. The Father does it all.

Ah, herein is love! Free love! Forgiving love! Love to the uttermost. Love without measure. Yes, such is the love of God to the sinner. He is rich in mercy, and abundant in lovingkindness. There is nothing like it in earth or heaven.

XLVII.

NOAH'S DAYS.

"And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark; and the flood came, and destroyed them all."—LUKE XVII. 26, 27.

OUR Lord's comparison between the days preceding his own coming and the days of Noah throws us back on the sixth chapter of Genesis, from which we learn—

(1.) *The state of the world in Noah's days.* There was ungodliness, corruption, violence, lust, flesh-pleasing, vanity, pleasure, engrossment with business, so that there was no room for God either in man's thoughts or man's world. Verses 5 and 11.

(2.) *God's inquiry.* It is said that He *saw* and that He *looked*; as in the case of Sodom (Ch. xviii. 21), He "makes inquisition." He does not judge hastily or at random, but calmly and deliberately. Hence his condemnation is such a solemn thing, and his vengeance so awful.

(3.) *God's feelings as to all this.* It "repented the Lord, and it grieved Him at his heart." Though He is speaking after the manner of man, yet these words are the utterance of profoundest feeling. He is not indifferent as to our treatment of Him; He speaks like a broken-hearted father, disappointed in his fondest hopes.

(4.) *God's thoughts in consequence of this.* He must withdraw his Spirit. That Spirit must strive no more. God cannot allow Him to be thus grieved and quenched. He must retire.

(5.) *God's sentence.* (Verses 7 and 13), "I will destroy"; "the end of all flesh is come before me." He must now declare his judgment and indicate the course He means to pursue. In this sentence man is to read his guilt, and God's abhorrence of his crimes.

(6.) *God's long suffering.* (Verse 3, and 1 Pet. iii. 20.) He pronounces the sentence on the spot, but He delays its execution, for He has long patience, not willing that any should perish. He gives man one hundred and twenty years to turn and live. How long He bears! How much He loves and pities! How desirous to bless and love; how reluctant to curse and to destroy!

(7.) *God's sovereign grace.* The world would not be saved, but God would have some one whom He might deliver. His free love fixes on one man. Him it selects; him it lays hold of; him it carries through; and for his sake the whole family. Such is grace. "By the grace of God we are what we are." It is grace that makes the exceptions in a world of evil, and shews itself in some saved ones, however few.

Such is a sketch of Noah's days. Let us compare these with the days of the Son of man. Mark the resemblance which our Lord suggests.

I. *In the characteristics of evil.* All that marked Noah's days is to mark the last days; only evil is to be yet more developed and pronounced in all its forms. God allows

sin to ripen and unfold itself, that its true character may be seen, and that the human heart may be fully revealed in all its aspects of opposition to God. He has sought to check it ; He has given his fiery law ; He has raised up prophets ; He has inflicted judgments ; He has sent his Son. But all in vain. Man will not turn to God. He will not be restrained ; and God gives him over to a reprobate mind. That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and the flesh is ever shewing itself. The seed of the serpent is the same to the last. Satan is the same throughout. Iniquity is to swell, and deepen, and overflow, and toss its waves of darkness, till earth becomes a suburb of hell. 2 Tim. iii. 1 ; 2 Peter iii. 1 ; Jude 18. No law, no restraint, no Bible, no Christ, no God, no religion, no Sabbath, no heaven, no hell, no eternity ! Death is a sleep ! All evil, from Cain's downward, concentrated and expanded in the days of the Son of man ! It is to this that we are hastening on ! Nothing but self ; self-will, self-pleasing, self-indulgence, flesh-pleasing, lust, pleasure-seeking. Let us eat and drink. Our lips are our own ; who is Lord over us ? Universal apostacy ; rejection of God and of his Christ, prophet, priest, and king. All this on an earth marked with frequent judgment. In Noah's days there had been no previous judgment ; not so in the last. Every thing in the world's long history tells what sin is, what it has done, how God hates it, how He will avenge it, and how He will utterly sweep away the transgressor. The whole history of man, as well as the whole Bible, gives the lie to the fable that sin is just men's misfortune, and that God will not be very hard on the transgressor ; as

for eternal punishments, they are a libel on God's character ! Such is modern progress,—modern development !

II. *In the long-suffering of God.* (2 Pet. iii.) Truly it is long-suffering. Noah's days were nothing to the last days, as a revelation of long-suffering. Ages of long-suffering ! So many mercies, so many warnings ! This long-suffering cannot be measured. It passeth knowledge. It is infinite and divine. What a gospel do we preach to the world when we tell of ages of long-suffering ! In Noah's days it was one hundred and twenty years ; in ours it has been already thousands. Reckoning from the cross, we can point to eighteen centuries of long-suffering. What a message to rebellious man ! The message of divine compassion and the good news of infinite grace and love.

III. *In the warnings given.* Noah's message was, "I will destroy" ; and "the end of all flesh is come before me" ; He made the world ring with these warnings. So our warnings are yet more terrible and quite as definite, "The end of all things is at hand." "Behold the Lord cometh." "The Judge standeth before the door." Vengeance, sword, fire, the blackness of darkness for ever. Read Matt. xxiv. 21, 31 ; 2 Thess. i. 6-9 ; 2 Pet. iii. 7-10 ; Rev. vi. 12, 17 ; viii. 13 ; xiv. 8-11 ; xvi. 15-21. Terrible warnings ! And they shall all come to pass. Careless man of earth, can you hear them unmoved ? Is it nothing to you that such infinite wrath is preparing for the world ? Oh flee from the wrath to come !

IV. *In the handful of witnesses.* Only Noah and his

family. He is the one preacher of righteousness. He condemns the world! So shall it be in the last days. When the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth? Satan shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. God shall send strong delusion. Only a few shall be found faithful. Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many wax cold. A few out of millions! A few even among professing Christians and in Christian churches! "Few that be saved"; fewer at the close! Let us hold fast our testimony in an age of unbelief.

V. *In the deliverance of these witnesses.* The deluge comes, but Noah is safe. The flood touches him not. God has provided an ark. So with the saints in the last days. They shall be delivered from the fiery deluge. Some tribulation they may have to pass through, but the last and terrible one they shall escape from. "Watch and pray always that ye may be counted worthy to escape these things, and to stand before the Son of man."

VI. *In the suddenness of the judgment.* They knew not until the flood came! So shall the coming be. He comes as a thief; as a snare; as the lightning. One taken and the other left. The world might have known, but they would not. They said, "peace and safety" to the last. Then in a moment the trumpet sounds; the fire comes; the Lord appears; oh be ready. In the last days perilous times shall come. They shall end in the coming of the Son of man. Enter the ark and be safe for ever.

XLVIII.

THE LOWEST AND HIGHEST.

LUKE XIX. 11-27.

THIS parable is spoken to correct a mistake among his followers. They thought that the kingdom of God was *immediately* to appear, or be "manifested." It does not seem that their views of the nature of the kingdom were incorrect. These were not so carnal as we sometimes suppose. They believed in the promised kingdom; and in Jesus as the promised King; and in Jerusalem as the centre or metropolis. Our Lord does not interpose to correct these beliefs; but assumes them as true. But they were wrong as to the *time*. They thought it *immediate*. He corrects this in the following parable. He shews them that He must first suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. Let us bring out the meaning of the parable under the following heads or points, the three persons or classes of persons, the three events, the three transactions.

I. *The three classes of persons.*

1. *The nobleman.* It is literally the "high-born man." This is Christ's name; the name of Him who is the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father. He is higher than the kings of the earth. His is a heavenly parentage; and His relationships are all divine. In all senses He is a nobleman; the heir of a kingdom.

2. *The servants.* Not His disciples only of that day ; not the Jews only ; but all who enter His service by believing in His name and following him. As He was the Father's servant, so are we his. Each one who calls himself a Christian undertakes this service. These servants are not all alike faithful, or alike zealous ; nor are they all alike gifted. But they all profess to be doing his work.

3. *The citizens.* Not the men of Jerusalem only or Judea, but the men of this earth. They are subjects of his kingdom, in so far as they are dwellers on his earth. They hear of him and of his claims to rule ; but they hate and reject him. These are the open rejectors of the Lord. Yet they are called citizens, "His citizens."

II. *The three events.*

1. *The departure.* This nobleman comes to the region where his kingdom is to be ; but there is a hindrance as to his immediate occupancy of the throne. He must leave and go to some far country to receive the kingdom and to return. So Christ came to earth, the seat of his promised empire ; but not as monarch, or at least not to exercise his sovereignty. He must depart. He must go to the Father to receive the kingdom. He has gone ; and He is in that country now.

2. *The absence.* He is now absent. He is preparing for the day of sovereignty. He is receiving the kingdom ; and *proving* the servants and the citizens in his absence. He proves the servants, making this day of his absence the special day of service ; and giving to each one work

to do, as well as gifts to do it with. It is in his absence that we are specially called to shew our service,—to be faithful and zealous.

3. *The return.* He is not always to remain in this far country. He is to return when the fulness of the times has come. He comes back with honour and glory to a kingdom. His shame and sorrow are done. He has come to be glorified, to reign. This same nobleman, this same Jesus will come,—He will not tarry. Such is the Father's purpose ; such is His own promise, "Surely I come quickly."

III. *The three transactions.*

1. *The commission.* He calls his servants, and assigns them their work, apportioning their gifts and spheres. He deals with them personally and directly. He does not send them to his work at their own charges or in their own strength. It is not a commission to *some* servants, but to *all*, to *each*,—not to ministers only, but to each one who names his name. He gives you a commission when he gives you pardon ; He not only says, "I forgive you all your iniquities, go and sin no more" ; but, "I forgive you, go and work for me." If we have had any personal dealing with Christ about salvation, we have received this commission.

2. *The judgment.* He comes to judge as well as to reign ; and his first act is to examine his servants. Have you done my work ? Have you made use of my gifts ? I left you to yourselves for awhile, but I am now come to ask an account of your doings. What have you to shew

in the shape of work done for me? Each is examined according to what he has received, and questioned as to what he has done. None exactly alike. Some more, some less faithful; some wholly unfaithful and unprofitable.

3. *The recompense.* All are not only judged, but recompensed; each receiving according to his deeds.

(1.) *The faithful.* They receive His "well done," and a glory proportioned to their work.

(2.) *The unfaithful.* They are stripped of everything, and cast into outer darkness (Matt. xxv.).

(3.) *The citizens.* These were never servants; always rejectors, enemies, rebels. These are the multitude, who hear of Christ, but yield no obedience, choose another master and another service,—the hosts of Anti-Christ,—the men of the world, the mixed multitude in our churches. They are summoned only to be "slain," destroyed by the breath of His mouth and the brightness of His coming.

XLIX.

CHRIST MUST HAVE PRAISE.

"If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."—LUKE XIX. 40.

THE meaning of this passage is briefly this—"Christ must have praise somewhere ; if not at one place and by one class, then assuredly somewhere else and by another class : rather than that He should not have this, a miracle would be wrought, and the stones made to cry out."

Christ must have praise. Why?

I. *Because it is His due.* It is due to His *person*. He is Son of God, and Son of man ; the possessor of all created and all uncreated excellence ; the centre of every divine and every human perfection. Praise is his due, his right, his lawful and necessary claim. It is due to him as the Word made flesh, as Messiah, as the King that cometh in the name of the Lord. It is due to his *work and office*. He comes as the revealer of the Father and the Father's will ; the executor of the Father's purpose ; the object of the Father's love ; the doer of the mighty work in which the Father was to be glorified and peace made, and love carried out to the sinner in a righteous way.

II. *Because it is the Father's purpose.* That purpose is that Christ should be praised, that He should receive

honour, and glory, and blessing. The Father presents Him to us as the great object of universal praise. He says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him;" let all men worship Him; let creation worship Him; let this earth worship Him, even its stones. For such a purpose (viz., concentrating all praise on Jesus), He must have infinitely wise reasons, even though we did not see them. But what has been made known concerning the person and work of Messiah, shews how infinitely reasonable and glorious that purpose is.

There are some who dislike this praise and this purpose. Such were the Pharisees. Not the "publicans and sinners." Self-righteousness, a self-justifying, self-exulting, religion is the most opposed to the praise of Christ. The professors of it hate such praise. They cannot bear to hear it from others, far less to give it themselves; the voice of praise calls forth their enmity. There are others who are simply *silent*. They are engrossed with other things, or indifferent. They do not trouble themselves about the matter. They close their lips and their ears. Does either of these classes describe any here? Are there some disregarding the Father's purpose, and giving no praise to Him whom He delighteth to honour? What! Neither praise nor love! Neither homage nor obedience!

Now what will this refusal, this silence, this anger do?

1. *It will not profit themselves.* It will not make them happier. It will not secure any favour or honour for them. It will not forward their prospects for eternity. It will not avail them in the day of wrath, or serve them at the judgment-seat.

2. *It will not lessen Christ's honour.* He will still deserve the honour, though they refuse to give it. He will still be the infinitely loveable, infinitely glorious one, possessed of the name that is above every name.

3. *It will not silence others.* Heaven will still praise Him, the redeemed will still praise Him. His enemies may be dumb, but that will not silence angels. It will not close one lip, nor cause one tongue to falter.

4. *It will not hinder the fulfilment of the Father's purpose.* That purpose shall stand, whoever may resist. If these be silent, the stones shall immediately cry out. If one will not praise Him, another shall. He must have praise; and that praise shall never sink lower than a certain amount. If it should do so, from the silence of those who were expected to praise Him, others—even the unlikeliest—even the dead creation, the stones, will cry out,—cry out in praise, and cry out against the wretched men who have refused the honour. God's purpose concerning Christ, and the praise due to Him, shall be carried out to the uttermost, both in time and eternity, both in earth and heaven. That purpose is even now unfolding itself. Christ is glorified even here. There are some that praise Him, in every kingdom and out of every kindred, and every new soul gathered in adds to the song of praise. All earth shall yet praise Him. Creation's universal song of praise shall begin when He returns in His glory to make all things new. All heaven praises, and shall praise Him. Every angel glorifies Him. The hosts of heaven ascribe blessing to the Lamb. Nay, all the universe shall yet praise Him. Every thing that hath

breath and being shall praise Him. Sun, moon, and stars shall praise Him, throughout the widest space !

Are *you* praising Him, brethren ? By lip and life, by word and deed ? Helping others to praise Him ; gathering in the unpraising ones of earth that they may praise Him ?

Will you praise Him, O men ? You who have praised self, the creature, the world—"nature," as you call it,—will you now begin to praise Him who is infinitely worthy of all your praise and love ?

L.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

“*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads ; for your redemption draweth nigh.*”—LUKE XXI. 28.

THE things here referred to are the signs of his coming ;—the sure tokens given by himself that He is at the doors. When these are just *beginning* to unfold themselves, then be of good cheer ; your deliverance is at hand (redemption, see Rom. viii. 23). He uses two remarkable words to indicate the effects which ought to be produced by these premonitory signs ;—(1.) lift yourselves up (*ἀναστῆναι*, stoop no more,—lift up your *bodies*) ; (2.) lift up your *heads* ; do not merely stand with erect body, but turn your head and eyes upward. The church's posture has hitherto been that of one *bowed down* (Ps. 14, xxxviii. 6, xliv. 25) under the heavy burdens of an evil day and an evil world. Both body and head are bent towards the earth in grief. But so soon as she hears the signal of her Lord's approach, she rises up from her stooping posture, she looks upwards to descry the coming deliverance and glory.

It is of great moment, then, that we read the signs aright ; not only as given here by our Lord, but afterwards by his apostles. It is of little consequence in what order we take them. They are numerous, and scattered over the

New Testament. I take them alphabetically for the sake of memory.

I. *Antichristianity*. I mean not Popery merely, but all the forms, in which opposition to Christ shews itself; whether false doctrine or active hostility to Christ. A false Christianity; error regarding the person and work of Christ; subversion of the cross, and blood, and righteousness of Christ; all the ways in which Christ is opposed, directly or indirectly; in which men are uttering the cry, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; let us break their bands and cast away their cords (Luke xix. 14; Ps. ii. 3; Acts iv. 27). There are many antichrists.

II. *Disbelief of the advent*. The advent of Christ itself shall be one of the things which scepticism shall assail. There are two classes which shall be found rejecting it,—the professing Christian who says, "My Lord delayeth his coming,"—the scoffing world that says, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

III. *Error*. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is still being eaten by man, and still infusing its poison. Love of knowledge is the professed starting-point. But in the pursuit of this, God is not acknowledged as the teacher, nor the Bible as the infallible text-book. Speculation abounds; inspired trammels are flung off; pride of intellect operates; man worships his own mind; every day brings forth some novel opinion; revelation is thrust down from its high position; every form of error gets vent; till God gives men over to a reprobate mind, and sends them strong delusion that they should believe

a lie. "They will not endure sound doctrine," but are "carried about with every wind of doctrine."

IV. *Energy of evil.* Evil men and seducers are to wax worse and worse. Sin will unfold itself to the uttermost. The human heart will speak out. It will not be dormant or inactive evil; it will be energetic to the utmost in seeking to counteract the good,—nay, to destroy it utterly. In some ages evil seems to sleep. In the last days it will awake to full life and activity. It will seize every instrument, the press, the pulpit, the platform. It will enlist every science and art,—music, sculpture, painting, poetry, philosophy,—making them all subservient to its development. Satan, both as the prince of darkness, and as an angel of light, will come down, having great wrath, to put forth his wiles, his powers, to the utmost. The multiplication of crimes, contempt of laws, blasphemies, these are specimens of the energy of evil.

V. *Formalism.* The apostle, after enumerating the sins of the last days, adds this: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." There is to be the appearance of religion to suit the "religious" part of man's nature; but this is to be coupled with all sin, and error, and ungodliness,—nay, infidelity. Whited sepulchres; wells without water; trees without fruit; lamps without oil; a religion without the Holy Ghost!

VI. *Latitudinarianism.* Indifference to revealed truth, nay, to all truth; making light of error; holding that all religions are so far right and acceptable, and that there are a thousand ways to heaven, if there be a heaven or a hell at all. Laxity of opinion, and laxity of morals, will

prevail. Immorality is to overflow in every form, and will not be condemned. A loose faith, and a loose practice, an easy law, an easy gospel ; all the evils described in the third chapter of second Timothy, unfolding themselves, and not disapproved of.

VII. *Missions.* Towards the close of the last days, we are to expect special efforts in behalf of Jew and Gentile. The gospel is to be preached to all nations. The Jew is to be sought out. The Bible is to go over the earth. The messengers of Christ are to make their errand known. At no time since the apostles has this been the case so much as now.

VIII. *Political changes.* European changes ; the reconstruction of the ten kingdoms ; the breaking up of old land marks ; the confusion of all political principle ; the placing of government in the hands of the lowest ; the speaking evil of dignities.

IX. *Pride and self-will.* The pride of power ; the pride of knowledge and intellect ; self-reliance ; belief in self-regeneration, without the power of God, or the Holy Ghost. Unwillingness to brook restraints : " Our lips are our own ; who is Lord over us ? " This wilfulness or lawlessness is to come to a head in Antichrist ; but it is to be manifested everywhere, in the church and in the world. Self-will ! That is to be the characteristic of the last days.

X. *Restlessness.* Many shall run to and fro. The whole world shall be in motion ; fermentation everywhere ; rushing hither and thither ; unable to be still. As the man possessed by a devil could not rest, so our world in the last days, possessed by the devil, shall exhibit the very

restlessness of hell,—of him who is ever going to and fro in the earth, walking up and down in it.

XI. *Satanic influences.* We see this not only in the errors and blasphemies that are abroad,—infidelity and atheism. But we see it in the pretended communications with the invisible world, the spirit-rapping, and spirit-consulting, which is spreading everywhere; so that millions are under these subtle and potent influences.

XII. *Wars.* The world's great crisis is the Armageddon battle. Up till that time there are to be wars and rumours of wars.

XIII. *Worldliness.* This present evil world is to be the object of man's idolatry. In this way materialism will shew itself. Religious materialism, ecclesiastical materialism, political materialism. This material world in all its aspects will be worshipped. Luxury, lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, &c., all mingle together to make up the intense worldliness of the last days.

LI.

DELIVERANCE IN THE DAY OF THE LORD.

“ Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”—LUKE XXI. 36.

THIS chapter, though relating at its commencement to the days of our Lord, runs on far into the future, and carries us down to his second coming. The “last days” are the times more especially referred to ; the days which end with his arrival as Judge and King.

I. *These days are days of calamity.* Both for Israel and for the church ; nay, for the world also, these were to be days of sorrow. These sorrows were to be various, as if all past calamities were summed up and gathered together in these. Then are the vials of divine wrath to be poured out. Nothing in the past can equal them. Judgments, terrors, persecutions ; earthquakes, overturnings, darkenings of sun and moon and stars ; these and such like are to mark that awful day. The destruction of Jerusalem was only a shadow of this. The Indian horrors are but preludes of what is coming. The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness and gloominess.

II. *These calamities are to be very widespread.* They are to be terrible as the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, but far more universal. They are not mere judgments on a city or a land, but on a world ! The heavens and the

earth ; the sea and the land ; Israel and the Gentiles ; Jerusalem and Babylon ; Judea and Idumea ; all are to share the judgments, for all have sinned. God's sword shall smite and not spare ; for it is the day of His vengeance ; vengeance against sin, against idolatry, against Anti-Christian rebellion, against Jewish unbelief, against Apostate Christianity ; vengeance for dishonour done to Himself, to His Son, to His Spirit ; to His Bible, to His gospel, to His law. Like the deluge, the vengeance will overflow the earth.

III. *There will be some that will escape.* Such has always been the way in the execution of judgment. The great mass of the ungodly have perished, for God's purpose was to shew His hatred of sin ; but a few have been preserved to declare His grace and sovereign pleasure in saving whom He will. The flood swept the world away ; but Noah and his family were saved. The fire of heaven consumed the cities of the plain, yet Lot and his two daughters were preserved. Tens of thousands perished in the overthrow of Jerusalem, but the Christians in it escaped. So is it to be in the last and most terrible of God's visitations. A remnant shall be saved. Balaam asks, Who shall live when God doeth this ? And certainly it will be a time of trouble such as never was upon the earth, such as seems to make escape impossible. But some Noahs, some Lots, shall be delivered. God will shew how He can preserve as well as destroy ; how He can rain down judgment on Egypt, and yet keep Israel in safety.

IV. *This deliverance shall be by the direct hand and*

power of God. This passage does not say so. But others intimate that God will interfere to deliver. Indeed, in such a burst of universal vengeance, it seems difficult to conceive of any escaping save by miracle; either by being caught away from the judgment just before it begins, as in the case of Enoch, or being carried through the midst in safety, as in the case of Noah, or the three children in the furnace. God speaks of "chambers," into which He calls His people to enter until the indignation be over-past; and He speaks of the righteous being taken away from the evil to come; and the 91st Psalm will be specially fulfilled to these preserved ones in that day of trial and destruction.

V. *They who are saved are they who watch and pray.* There are many allusions in the prophets to a chosen few of faithful worshippers who are to be delivered. We commonly give these passages a mere general application, as referring to any time of calamity; and no doubt they are so written as to bear this meaning, and to afford comfort to God's believing ones in any day of sorrow. But like many other words of the prophets, they have a fuller meaning, and point to a prophetic application in the last days. Such is Psalm xci. Such is Isaiah xxiv. 13, 14; xxxiii. 14-16; Mal. iii. 16, 17. And in these passages the characters of the delivered are fully described. But our Lord in His exhortation here sets them before us in two words, Watch and pray; two words which He elsewhere used, and which the Apostle Peter, doubtless remembering the Master's words, makes use of, "The end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer."

(1.) *Watch.* Beware of sleep. It is a drowsy world ; or rather it is a world fast asleep in sin. It is the world's night, and this induces drowsiness. It is to be specially the temptation of the church in the last days, "while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Many things in the present day tend to lull us asleep ; worldly prosperity, the progress of the arts, outward comforts, luxury, freedom from danger, want of persecution. We are in danger of being overcome by these opiates, these soporifics of the evil one. Therefore let us *watch*. Let us be ever on our guard against the drowsiness that is constantly overtaking us. Let us beware of being led into this by pleasure, or covetousness, or vanity, or love of ease. Let us *watch*. It is not for nothing that God has spoken to us during these late years in such appalling judgments abroad, such afflictive disasters at home. He says, Awake, to those that are asleep. He says, Watch, to those who are drowsy. Let us not sleep as do others.

(2.) *Pray.* While watching, let us pray. Let us watch upon our knees. A watching time should be a praying time. It is to more than merely keeping ourselves awake that the Lord calls us. Pray ; pray always ; or literally, *in all times* and seasons ; not yesterday only, but to-day ; not in darkness only, but in the light ; not in adversity only, but in prosperity ; not in the day of bereavement, and terror, and weariness, but in the time of security, and comfort, and peace. Pray always. Pray without ceasing.

It is the watchers and the prayers that shall be saved out of, or carried through, the coming storm. Only they. If you fear the day of trouble that is at hand, watch and

pray. That only will avail. How God is to deliver in that day, I cannot say ; but He will, though it should be by a fiery chariot, or by an ark, or by his angel sent down from heaven. He will deliver.

VI. *These delivered ones shall stand before the Son of man.* This standing has a twofold reference : (1.) A standing in judgment (Ps. i. 5), *i. e.* being acquitted in the day of the Lord ; (2.) a standing in the presence of the Lord, as in Rev. vii. 9, xiv. 1, 5, xv. 2, xxii. 4. There is not merely deliverance in that day for these, but glory and triumph in the presence of the King. They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. They shall stand before him as part of his glorious retinue, his honoured ones, his chosen ones, his blessed ones. Having suffered with Him, they shall reign with Him ; having been partakers of his shame, they shall be sharers of his glory.

Watch and pray always ; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. For the time is short, and the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. This year may unfold much ; be ready for what is coming. Whether it usher in the advent of the Lord or not, be ready. Watch and pray. Your own spiritual prosperity demands this. Your exemption from impending judgment demands this. Your usefulness in the world, during the world's brief remaining day, demands this. The glory of your Lord demands this ; and the Lord himself expects it at your hand. Watch ye therefore, and pray always !

LII.

THE NEW WINE OF THE KINGDOM.

“For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”—LUKE XXII. 18.

TWO feasts had just been celebrated by our Lord and his disciples immediately before these words were spoken. The first was the Passover, and the second was the Supper. Both of these were festivals of rejoicing, the one for Israel after the flesh, the other for the Israel of God, the saved and called ones of every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. It might seem then to the disciples as if this were now at last the beginning of their joy, a joy no more to be overclouded or withdrawn. It might seem as if this were the final cementing of their happy union, a union no more to be broken up. Notwithstanding all that the Lord had said about his approaching sufferings, they were so “slow of heart to believe,” that they might be even at this moment imagining that the time of their tribulation was now about to close and the hour of their triumph to begin. In a prospect such as this they would be disposed greatly to rejoice, not for their own sakes only, but for the sake of a Master whom they loved so well, and over whose unceasing sorrow their loving hearts had often mourned.

Perhaps it might be then, to counteract some such rising feeling of exultation, that our Lord addressed to them the

words of our text : " But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." They were right in their anticipations of the coming kingdom, with all its fulness of joy, but they had altogether miscalculated the time of its approach. They still overlooked the suffering that lay between. They refused to admit the idea of Messiah's shame and death as being the only way to his final glory and honour in the everlasting kingdom. In the verse before us He makes reference to the interval that still lay between Him and the kingdom. He tells them that though there should certainly come a day of festal joy, in which He and they should rejoice together, yet that day was not immediately at hand. It would assuredly come, but not *now*. They must prepare for separation, not for union ; for sorrow, not for joy ; for fasting, not for feasting ; for the Bridegroom's absence, not His presence. This was His farewell-feast with His disciples until the day of the eternal meeting in the heavenly Jerusalem. And the words are evidently similar, in reference and import, to those of the apostle : " As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come."

It was as if he had said to his disciples, " You may think this the beginning of my joy and your joy, the dawning of a bright day of happy fellowship and union with each other. It is not so. It is the commencement of my deepest agony ; it is the last time that we shall thus feast together, till the kingdom shall come. Between that period and this, there is a long and dreary interval to

elapse. But after these dark days are over, then shall I sit down with you once more in happy communion, and drink of the fruit of the vine new with you at a better table ; not in this poor upper chamber of the earthly Jerusalem, but in one of the many mansions of my Father's house, prepared for us in the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from God."

There is a calm melancholy in these words which at once touches and subdues us. Simple as they are, a deep solemnity pervades them. Both He and they were sad ; yet it was expedient that He should go away. He would gladly have remained and feasted with them, but he had other work to do, both in earth and heaven. He must go. "I say"; "verily I say";—thus he assures them of the unwelcome truth of his departure. He thus speaks,

I. *Of a time when He did drink of the fruit (or "produce") of the vine.* This He had been doing since they had come together, at each feast, each passover, at their accustomed meals, at Simon's house, at Cana in Galilee ; partaking with them of their common food, and interchanging fellowship. He had expressed his desire to do so once more : "With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. He is now doing so,—presenting to us the bread of blessing and the cup of blessing. Thus Jesus delighted in human fellowship. He came not only to give joy to us, but to receive joy from us. He sought intercourse in every way. His delights were with the sons of men. See the whole of the Song of Solomon. Let us give Him the fellowship He seeks ; He longs for admittance to our house and board, let us not

shut Him out. His promise is, "I will come in and sup with him, and he with me."

II. *Of a time when He would not drink of the fruit of the vine.* "After this I shall not taste it again." He puts away from Him that cup, which was expressive of fellowship and joy. The period here alluded to consists of two parts : (1.) the period of his agony onward to his resurrection ; (2.) the period from his resurrection to his second coming.

(1.) *His agony and death.* He had hardly uttered these words when his enemies seized Him, led by a disciple. There was his betrayal, desertion, denial, scourging, crucifying, the myrrh and gall, and crown of thorns. Truly this was another cup ; not the fruit of the vine which maketh glad, but bitterness, and trembling, and death. As if he were now saying, "I have another cup to drink, a cup of gall and wrath,—to drink alone ; this cup I must drink that *you* may not drink it. I must forego your fellowship and love, for the presence of enemies ; now is the hour and power of darkness." What deep sadness is here ! It is the language of the man of sorrows ; of one who delighted in the love of his disciples, and would rather that this cup had passed from Him, but who was yet willing to drink it to the dregs. What deep love is here ! It is love which many waters could not quench.

(2.) *From his resurrection to his coming and kingdom.* The present interval is one of absence. Not that this is a period of suffering ; that is all over. But it is not the period of his full joy. That fulness is still future ; his great joy is still postponed. It is not perfected yet ; so long as He is

absent from His church and His kingdom ; so long as His chosen ones are not gathered ; so long as the bride is not ready, and the marriage not consummated, and the bodies of his beloved are still lying in the grave. Thus he reserves or postpones his full joy till the great day of resurrection and reunion.

III. *Of a time when He shall drink again of the fruit of the vine with them.* That is the day of his coming and kingdom ; the day of his crowning is the day of the gladness of his heart (Song iii. 11). It is the day of feasting (Isa. xxv. 6). It is the day of his royal glory. It is the marriage day ; the day of full fellowship with his own. He shall then drink the wine of the kingdom, and drink it new with them ; not as in Cana, the guest, but himself the bridegroom ; the governor of the feast as well as the provider of the wine.

Let us mark here,

(1.) *His deep sorrow.* He is like one surrounded with friends, yet having within him a grief too deep for utterance.

(2.) *The calm resignation.* As if He said, "I leave this happy company to suffer." He shrinks not, murmurs not, though foreseeing the cup he is about to drink. He goes calmly, like a lamb to the slaughter. "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

(3.) *The gentle love.* It is love that utters these words ; love willing to be torn away from the beloved object, if by this he can be of service to it. He pleased not himself. It was our happiness he sought.

(4.) *The joy in our fellowship.* Interchange of affec-

tion is what he seeks. His desire is for nearness and communion.

(5.) *The anticipation of the glory.* There is glory to be revealed; glory for Him as for us; when he returns to his kingdom. For this he longs. "I come quickly," he says. Let us answer, Even so come, Lord Jesus! Come to raise thy saints! Come to the marriage supper! Come to the crown and throne. Come to the joy and glory.

LIII.

THE HEAVENLY FEAST.

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”—LUKE XXII. 19, 20.

THIS was Passover-night; the anniversary of “the night much to be remembered,” when the Lord God of Israel led Israel out of Egypt. Jesus kept all the passovers; and specially He desired to keep this, the last of the long series of memorable nights in which Israel commemorated the grand deliverance. Jesus,—Messiah,—was the deliverer; and He is now for the last time commemorating his own mighty deed of deliverance. Here is the last of the old, the first of the new.

But He has scarce finished the passover ere He constitutes another ordinance. As in “dissolving views” one scene melts away before another; the new quietly supplants the old; the passover table and bread and wine silently vanish in the better table and bread and wine. For “Christ our passover” is now to be “sacrificed;” “Christ our passover” is now to be feasted on.

The roasted lamb disappears, and in its place come the bread and wine; the symbols of the new and better covenant. It is with these that we have to do in the

ordinance of the supper. And, as of the passover, so of the supper, Jesus is all.

I. *The taking of the bread.* It is *bread* that he takes ; one of the passover cakes ; made of the produce of this soil,—earth's wheat, sown, watered, springing up and ripening here. For he *took* not the nature of angels, but He took the seed of Abraham. Himself the incarnate One, the Word made flesh He presents to us. He is very man, of the substance of the virgin, of the flesh of man, true seed of the woman, true Son of Adam ; not angelic, but human, thoroughly human in His nature ; man all over in everything but sin ; for that passover cake was without leaven.

II. *The thanksgiving.* The other evangelists call it “blessing.” The meaning is the same. He “gave thanks” and He “blessed ;” not the bread, but God ; for “it” is not in the original. He praised God in connection with this bread. Jesus gave thanks for the bread, and specially for that of which it was the symbol. He gave thanks to the Father for his now almost completed work, and for all that that work was to accomplish.

III. *The breaking of the bread.* He broke the thin passover cake in pieces, that thereby He might complete the symbol. For the breaking was a most important part of the feast. The bread was to be first broken before it was eaten. Not a bone of Him was to be broken, and yet his body was to be broken. The “bruising of the heel” and the “breaking of the body” were the two expressions used to denote his suffering work as the substitute or sacrifice for sin. It is not *incarnation* merely

that we have in the supper, but death,—sacrificial death ; the body broken by the burden of our guilt laid upon Him. Christ crucified is the alpha and omega of the Lord's supper. It is his cross that is set before us there ; his cross as the place where our guilt and our curse were borne.

IV. *The giving.* In many ways Christ gave himself to us ; but here it is specially as the *sin-bearer* that He does so. It is his *broken* body that He presents to us. This is his gift to us. That broken body, with the sin-bearing work which it accomplished, He *gives* to us. It is the gift of his love ; the love that passeth knowledge.

V. *The word of explanation and command.* The explanation is, "This is my body, given for you." The command is, "This do in remembrance of me." Thus, we learn these two things (1.) that it is the *body* of Christ,—Christ on the cross,—that we have so specially to do with here ; "my flesh is meat indeed ;" (2.) that the Lord's supper is a memorial of Christ himself ; not a sacrifice, but the memorial of a sacrifice. That bread is to be received by us in remembrance of Christ. It fixes our eye on Jesus only.

Such is the first part of the supper ; that concerning the bread or body of the Lord. The second is like unto it ; concerning the wine or blood of the Lord. The process is repeated. As was done with the bread, so is it done with the wine.

(1.) *He took the cup.* It was the cup of blessing. He took to himself not only the flesh but the blood of man.

(2.) *He gave thanks* (Matt. xxvi. 27). For the wine as well as for the bread He gives thanks ;—double thanksgivings in this ordinance.

(3.) *He gave the cup*. The cup He meant for them as specially as the bread. Yes ; He gave it ; who then can take it away ? Can man, or priest, or church take the cup from us ? Does not He who takes the cup from us prove himself to be an Antichrist ?

(4.) *He bade them drink*. “Drink ye all of it” (Matt. xxvi. 27). And “they all drank of it” (Mark xiv. 23). It is by his command that we drink. He says to us, “Drink” ; not, Gaze on it ; but, Drink of it.

(5.) *He interprets the cup*. “This cup is the new testament in my blood.” In Mark (xiv. 24) it is, “This is my blood of the new testament.” In 1st Corinthians (x. 16) it is called “the cup of blessing,” and the “communion of the blood of Christ.” Thus the cup connects us, (1.) with the new covenant ; (2.) with the blood ; (3.) with blessing ; (4.) with communion. In that cup we see the covenant, the blood, the blessing, the communion. Let us fully understand it, and realise its contents.

Of these symbols,—of this whole ordinance,—we may say truly,—

(1.) *The love of Christ is here*. It is the feast of love. The symbols tell of love. The whole scene is love. His banner over us is love.

(2.) *The joy of Christ is here*. It is not the man of sorrows that we hear in this feast. Joy and peace are here. “My peace ;” “my joy.”

(3.) *The glory of Christ is here.* For though the symbols take us back to the cross, they bid us look forward to the coming and the glory. We shew his death till He come.

LIV.

THE THREE CROSSES.

“And there were also two others, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors; one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding: and the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lorā, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”—LUKE XXIII. 32-43.

THE place of this transaction is Jerusalem; the holy city; outside its walls. The scene is that of three crosses, three criminals, soldiers, priests, a Jewish crowd, a great execution, a few weeping women, and one or two afflicted men in the distance. It has much to say to us; most of it not upon the surface, but hidden and silent; something of God, of the Saviour, of the sinner; some-

thing of sin, of salvation, of damnation ; something of heaven, of earth, of hell ; sin pardoned, sin unpardoned ; a soul won, a soul lost : Christ received, Christ rejected.

Let us select a few lessons.

I. *Man's hatred of God.* Human enmity, malice, envy, come out in every part of the transaction. Pilate's hall ; the scourging, mocking, spitting, smiting ; the cry, Crucify ; the nailing, the wagging the head ; the thief's railing. The very idea of placing Him between two malefactors a reproof of desperate malice ; the refinement of hatred. Here are man's heart, hands, tongue, all coming out against God and his Son. If there were a spark of love in man, it would have come out. But only hatred ! "Haters of God" is written on each forehead yonder ; "enmity to God" breaks forth in word and deed. It was not love, it was not mere indifference that came out at Calvary, but *hatred* ; the hatred of the human race to the God who was yearning over it in love.

II. *God's love to man.* Herein is love ! Love to the uttermost ; unquenched and unquenchable by all that man can do. Man pours floods upon this love to quench it, but it grows more intense. What patience with man's utmost malice ; what forbearance with his sin ! "Father forgive them ; for they know not what they do." Was ever love like this ? So large, so free, so overflowing. Sin abounding ; grace much more abounding. The tide of divine love meeting that of human hatred, and overcoming it.

III. *God's purpose to finish the work.* He will not

suffer Himself to be provoked to leave the propitiation half finished, the sacrifice half offered. Man does his utmost to provoke God to let him alone, to withdraw the salvation and the Saviour. But God's purpose shall stand. Every part of it shall be carried out. The wrath of man shall praise Him. All the indignities heaped upon the holy Son of God shall not cause Him to draw back in his work of righteous grace. It shall be finished! The altar shall be built,—built by man's enmity; the sacrifice shall be slain,—slain by man's enmity. The work shall be done!

IV. *The divine interpretation of the work.* The saved thief is a specimen of what it is appointed to do. Sin abounding, grace superabounding. What is yon cross erected for? To save souls! See, it saves one of the worst; one who had done nought but evil all his days. What does that blood flow for? To wash away sin. See, it washes one of the blackest. What does yon sufferer die for? To pardon the guiltiest. Not merely to save from hell, but to open Paradise to the chief of sinners,—to open it *at once*; not after years of torment, but “to-day.” To-day “with me.” Yes, Jesus goes back to heaven with a saved robber at his side! What an efficacy in yon cross! What grace, what glory, what cleansing, what healing, what blessing, yonder! Even “in weakness” the Son of God can deliver, can pluck brands from the burning, can defy and defeat the evil one. Such is the meaning of the cross! Such is the interpretation which God puts upon it by saving that wretched thief, whose hanging

yonder proves that he is under condemnation,—the first saved by the cross after it had been set up ; and Christ Himself goes up to join in the joy over one sinner that repenteth.

V. *How near to hell a man may be, and yet be saved.* That thief, was he not on the very brink of the burning lake ; one foot in hell ; almost set on fire of hell ? Yet he is plucked out. He has done nothing but evil all his days,—down to the very last hour of his life,—yet he is saved. He is just about to step into perdition, when the hand of the Son of God seizes him, and lifts him to Paradise ! Ah what grace is here ! What boundless love ! What power to save ! Who after this need despair ? Truly Jesus is mighty to save !

VI. *How near a man may be to Christ, and yet not be saved.* The other thief is as near the Saviour as his fellow, yet he perishes. From the very side of Christ he goes down to hell. From the very side of his saved fellow, he passes into damnation. We see the one going up to heaven from his cross, and the other going down to hell from it. In Judas we see one who had been with Christ in His life, go down to hell ; in the lost thief, one who was beside Him in His death. This is marvellous ; and it is fearful ! Oh what a lesson, what a sermon is here ! Was there ever such a warning given to us ! Can any of you be nearer to Christ than that thief was ? Looking at Him, hearing Him, speaking to Him ! He was lost after all ! Oh make sure. Not outward nearness ; not religion ; not contact with the Word of God ; not eating and drinking the symbols of His body and blood ; not all these can

save ! You may be very near Christ, and yet not be *in* Him. Your next neighbour may be saved, and you lost ; one taken, the other left. Take heed ; make sure. Salvation is too precious to be trifled with !

LV.

THE DISCIPLES' INVITATION TO THE MASTER.

"Abide with us."—LUKE XXIV. 29.

HERE it is not the Master to the disciple, but the disciple to the Master, that is saying, *Come*. It is not the Lord that is standing at the door and saying, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me"; it is the disciple that is saying, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord." As of old, He said to Jacob at Peniel, "Let me go for the day breaketh," so here it is said, "He made as though He would have gone further"; but as Jacob said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," so do the two disciples here, "they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us"; and as He blest Jacob ere He parted from him, so here He does go in and sit down with them, and when He quits them He leaves a blessing behind Him, for the house seems filled with the odour of the ointment, doubtless to retain its fragrance for many a day.

The request seems to have been made for two reasons,—on their own account and on his. They had enjoyed his converse and fellowship by the way so much that they are unwilling to part; and, besides, the evening is coming on, and He must not expose Himself to the dews, and cold, and darkness of the night.

The latter of these reasons we cannot use now in the sense in which they were used by the disciples. The risen Christ is now far beyond the days and nights of time ; beyond the mists and clouds of earth ; far beyond the chills and the gloom of this world. He needs no earthly roof to shelter Him, and no earthly table to sit at. He is now in his Father's house, and on his Father's throne, compassed about with light, and majesty, and glory, and honour.

But in his members He is now passing through the same hardships, and sufferings, and privations as when He was here. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*" is still his expostulation ; and still He so identifies Himself with his saints that we may use the words which originally meant Him personally in reference to ourselves as one with Him. Without, however, confining it to this sense, let us meditate as follows upon these words, "Abide with us."

1. *Abide with us, for past days have been so pleasant.* Since first we apprehended Thee, or rather since Thou didst apprehend us,—since thou didst overtake us on the way, we have found such blessedness, that we cannot bear the thought of parting. Thy fellowship has been so sweet that we must have more of it. The little that we tasted in the past, makes us long for more. Abide with us.

2. *Abide with us, for the world would be a blank without thee.* Life would not be life if thou wert gone. We should be like the disciples on the stormy sea,—“It was night, and Jesus had not come to them.” Night and tempest, without moon and stars, would be nothing to this

world without thee. A house left desolate without an inmate, without a sound, or a voice, or footstep, would be nothing to the dreariness of our earth and of our homes without thee. All would be blank and chilling. It is *Thou* who fillest hearts, and lightest up homes, and gladdenest even wildernesses with thy presence.

A wilderness is populous enough
So had I but thy heavenly company ;
For where thou art, there is the world itself,
With every several pleasure in the world ;
And where thou art not, desolation.

Oh abide with us.

3. *Abide with us, for we know not what our future is to be.* We know the past, we know the present, but the future is hid. For that future and all its uncertainties, we need a guide and a protector ; one who will light up our path, who will fight for us, who will deliver us and keep us to the last, in all changes, trials, sorrows, joys. Abide with us. Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation, O rest of the weary, O light of the dark, O Saviour of the lost, O joy of the sorrowful, O helper of the helpless,—unchanging companion, friend and kinsman, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning,—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ! Lead us out, leads us in, lead us along the way, lead us by the still waters, lead us into thy banquetting house, and let thy banner over us be love !

4. *Abide with us, for earth's night is at hand.* Time's shadows are lengthening ; its sun is going down behind

the hills of earth. The end of all things is at hand ; the day of the Lord hasteth greatly ; the time of vengeance and judgment cometh ; Satan is about to do his worst ; Antichrist will rage ; evil men and seducers will wax worse and worse ; perilous times will come ; wars and rumours of wars will disquiet us ; earthquakes shall be in diverse places, the sea and its waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things that are coming on the earth. Oh abide with us ! Abide with us in all thy love and grace ; in all thy strength and help ; in all thy joy and peace. Abide with us for evermore.

LVI.

RECEPTION OF CHRIST OUR INTRODUCTION
INTO SONSHIP.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."—JOHN I. 12, 13.

OF the Christ, the Christ coming into the world, yet rejected by the world; coming to Israel, yet rejected by Israel, the evangelist had been speaking. Then he reminds us that the rejection was not universal. He was acknowledged by *some*, however few; and these *some* were made partakers of no common honour; yet were they by nature no better than their fellows; owing all that they received to the sovereign God alone.

There is here (1.) the honour; (2.) the giver of it; (3.) the way of attainment; (4.) the personal change through which it is reached.

I. *The honour.* To become "sons of God" (*τετνα*, not *υιοι*); not merely by adoption, but by generation. It is the word used in Romans viii. 16,—"*beareth witness that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs;*" and in 1st John iii. 1,—"*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called sons of God!*" On our side there is *sonship*, on God's side *fatherhood*. Sonship is (1.) higher; (2.) nearer;

(3.) more blessed ; (4.) more glorious, than creaturehood. There is sonship in the angels, sonship in unfallen man ; but this is beyond these ; resting on a different foundation, introducing us into more intimate intercourse ; making us partakers of the divine nature ; partakers of Christ ; one in nature, privilege, honour, dignity with Him who is "*the Son of God.*" This is the honour to which God is calling us,—us who were children of wrath, children of the evil one ! He invites us to this. He beseeches us to receive the honour, the dignity, the blessedness ; to accept his divine fatherhood, to enter on the divine sonship ! Such is the love !

II. *The giver of it.* It is Christ himself. Elsewhere it is the Father ; here it is the Son. The Son makes us sons ! "He gave !"—the sonship is Christ's free gift. For all gifts are in *his* hands. "I give unto them eternal life ;" He gives the living water ; He gives the bread of life, which is his flesh. So here he gives the right or power of sonship. It is not, however, simply the sonship itself that is spoken of here ; but the right to it,—the power. This right, or power, or title, He has purchased for us ;—for those who had no right, nor power, nor title. He has so earned it, and so secured it, that it becomes a lawful and righteous title ; and being so, it is secure and eternal. This He holds out, presents to us, as his own and the Father's free gift. Become sons of God is the message of the gospel ! Not, as some say, ye are sons now, act on this, and be happy. But become sons ! Take the right, the title, so dearly bought, so freely given. It is not merely, Come unto me, and I

will give you rest ; but, Come unto me, and I will make you sons.

III. *The way of attainment.* There is no bargain, no price ; no terms, no conditions ; yet there is an appointed way ; and he who will have the sonship, must have it in this one way. This way is "receiving Him ;" and this receiving him is explained as "believing in his name."

(1.) *Receiving Him.* Doing the reverse of what Israel had done ; accepting Him as "the Word ;" the "light ;" the "life ;" the "Son ;" the "Christ ;" the Messiah sent of God ; accepting and owning Him for all that God had announced Him to be ; confessing with Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God ;" with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

(2.) *Believing on His name.* (1.) Believing, that is, receiving God's testimony to Him, and his own testimony to Himself. (2.) Believing on his name. We need not confine this to his actual name Jesus, but to all that has been revealed concerning Him ; his person, and character, and work. We get to know Him through his *name*,—through that revelation of Him which we find in the gospels. There we find *Himself* and his *name*.

Thus accepting all that has been testified concerning Him ; and joining with that the promise given of sonship to every one who thus accepts, we become sons of God. Faith in Him and in His name identifies us with Him who is the Son of God ; and as He is, so are we in the world.

IV. *The personal change through which this is reached.* We are "born," and so by birth become sons. We are

born into the heavenly family ; begotten again unto a lively hope. This is more than adoption, it is *birth*. As to this birth, the evangelist first tells us what it is not, before he tells us what it is.

(1.) *We are not born of blood*. Not of natural descent ; not of circumcision. Human blood has nothing to do with our divine birth. We are *not* sons by nature.

(2.) *Not of the will of the flesh*. Not by natural generation. The flesh, or old nature, has nothing to do with the new birth. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. The flesh neither *wills* to make us, nor can make us sons.

(3.) *Not of the will of man*. Not by adoption. No man, and no will of man, whether self or another, can produce this new birth. Man can only adopt children like himself ; children of wrath.

Then he adds, "but of God" ; out of Him ; by means of Him ; through His will ; His power. He alone can make us sons : can choose the honour for us, and us for the honour. It is *He* who begets sons ; it is He who calls them to this honourable name : "Of his own will He begat us with the word of truth (James i. 18). Yet this fact should hinder none. His will and His grace do not contradict each other. Go to Him for sonship. Receive His Son, and He will make you sons. "He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God."

LVII.

THE WORLD'S NEED OF SOMETHING MORE
THAN A TEACHER.

"We know that thou art a teacher come from God."—JOHN III. 2.

WE take Nicodemus as one of the best specimens of "religious humanity"; educated, moral, of high position and culture; a strict observer of religious rites, and seasons, and ordinances; a "ruler of the Jews," a "master of Israel," and a believer in Israel's promised Messiah.

He ought to have known fully Messiah's errand, and to have recognised Him at once when He came. But even Nicodemus, this well-instructed religious ruler and master, one of the heads of the strictest sect, fails to understand Him. He approaches Him only as a *teacher*. He accepts Him as such, but as nothing more. Like the rest of his nation and race, he was in quest of "knowledge"; and for such he went to Jesus. Like our first parents, he saw that "the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one *wise*"; this was all. He had no deeper sense of need. "We know that thou art a teacher come from God," was the intimation of his state of mind; it shewed how little his conscience was at work; how superficial, as well as self-righteous, were his views as to his own spiritual condition. He knew not that he was poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked.

Thus we have in him a specimen of man,—educated, moral, religious man,—unconscious of his own true need, and blind to God's provision for that need.

I. *Man's unconsciousness of his true need.* Nicodemus, with all his religious advantages, has not fathomed the depth of his own spiritual wants. He knows that he needs *something*; but he does not know *how much*; nor does he know what is the real nature of his great need. He wants a teacher,—that is all! He thinks that will suffice. But farther than this he goes not; deeper than this he descends not. He thinks there is but *one* empty chamber in his house; unconscious that all are empty, or if filled at all, filled with that which must be cast out and cast away. He thinks there is but a slight bruise in one of his limbs, when there is poison in every vein; when the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. He needs pardon; yet he is unconscious of condemnation. He needs reconciliation; yet he is unconscious of distance, and wrath, and doom. He needs life; yet he is unconscious of the death in which he lies. He does not know what *sin* is; what enmity to God is; what distance from God is; what it is to be lost; what it is to be without the favour and love of God; what the world is in which he dwells, and of which he forms a part; what Satan is, his great adversary. He has no idea of the extent of his ruin, and the greatness of his danger. He does not see that, apart from hell and wrath, the simple absence of God from the heart would be unutterable wretchedness. He does not see that simply to be left unchanged and unconverted would be of itself hell. But of all the evil

of sin, the evil of his own heart, he is utterly unconscious. He is not in the least alive to his *want*,—either as to its nature or its extent. Yes, humanity is unconscious of its ruin ! The human heart knows not the vacuity that has been made in it by the absence of God ; it knows not the malignity of one single sin,—one single act of disobedience, one moment's insubordination of the will, one moment's ceasing to love God with all the heart and soul. Unconsciousness of his own need ; insensibility to his own sin ; palsy of the conscience,—this is man's great evil. To remove this *unconsciousness*, and to impart true consciousness in regard to these things, is the first great work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. That this *unconsciousness* is voluntary and deliberate we cannot doubt. This is the aggravation of the evil ; this is the consummation of the guilt. Man shrinks from knowing the worst of himself ; nay, he refuses to know it. He wilfully shuts his eyes to the *nature* and to the *extent* of his spiritual evil. He tries to make himself believe that his case is not so very serious after all. He takes pride in owning himself a little in the wrong, needing some help, some light, some teaching ; but beyond that he refuses to go. Thus far Nicodemus went when he came to Jesus ; but at that time he was not prepared to go farther. But the Lord led him on. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

II. *Man's blindness to God's provision for his need.* He to whom Nicodemus came was God's provision for man's need. It was the provision of love and bounty ; “He spared not his Son.” But man does not appreciate

this provision, because he does not apprehend his own need. He wants a teacher,—that is all. Not a deliverer; not a priest; not a healer; not a cleanser; not a renewer; only a teacher! Not a *divine* teacher; only a teacher *come from* God. God's provision for our need assumes that that need is unspeakably great; so great as only to be supplied by one who is *divine*; a divine teacher (or prophet), a divine priest, a divine king. Man shuts his eyes to this. He refuses to interpret the provision which God has made for him, and in that infinite provision, to read the nature and extent of his own need. He shrinks from the acceptance of a *Saviour*, not willing to see that he really needs one, or at least one that is divine. He thinks he can do with less than *salvation*; he cannot think himself wholly lost. Yet what is the meaning of God sending His own Son, if less than salvation was intended; if less than incarnation will do, less than blood, less than death, less than resurrection? Oh let us understand the greatness of God's provision for us, and in that greatness, read at once our death and our life, our condemnation and our deliverance. Jesus met Nicodemus at once with the necessity of being born again. Mere teaching will not do; there must be the new birth; not a few new and good ideas, but regeneration! Nothing less. How this astounded the religious Jew *Thou* must be born again.

Yet one thing in Nicodemus is praiseworthy. He came directly to Jesus, and dealt with Him face to face. So say we to every one, Go thou and do likewise.

LVIII.

LIFE IN LOOKING TO JESUS.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”—JOHN III. 14, 15.

LET us here first read the *history*, and then mark the *symbol*.

The narrative begins with Israel's *sin*. It is the old sin of murmuring; distrust; dislike of God's provision; discontent with his dealings; preference of Egypt to the prospect of Canaan; disbelief of God's love, and denial of his faithfulness. And all this at the close of their forty years' desert sojourn! Forty years of the manna, of the water, of the pillar-cloud, and of all the love which these imply, had left them still the same!

The narrative proceeds with Israel's punishment. It was death; death from the hand of the Lord; a death of agony; a death by poison and fire; death by the instrumentality of serpents, which would not fail to remind them of the serpent of Paradise, by which our first parents were poisoned. The punishment was so ordered as to be the means of symbolising the remedy. Out of their destroyers the symbol of health is constructed. The image of destruction becomes the emblem of health and deliverance.

The remedy was simple, complete, divine. The image of their destroyers in brass, lifted up on a banner-pole, so

as to be visible to all. Thus sin, punishment, and remedy were all brought into view at once. They were reminded of their sin; they read their punishment; they received the cure.

The application of the cure was as simple as the cure itself. They had no hand in it; nothing to pay for it; nothing to do; no distance to walk; no effort to put forth. The cure was wholly of God; its power was resistless; no strength of disease could withstand it; however near death they might be, it mattered not. They looked and were cured.

Let us now mark the symbol. "All these happened unto them for ensamples." It is this ensample, or type, or emblem that our Lord here indicates; it is this that we are to read.

The sin in both cases is much the same; rebellion against God; unbelief; distrust; making God a liar; refusal to believe His word, or to receive His love. Of this sin the punishment is death; death by the hand of him that has the power of death, the old serpent, the devil; certain, agonising, burning death; the fire that is never quenched; the everlasting burnings; our veins filled with deadly poison, and every part racked with pain. The sin is not the less hateful for being unfelt; the punishment not the less deadly, because we may be insensible to its deadliness.

Let us now mark the manner of the cure.

I. *Christ made sin for us.* The deliverer takes the likeness of the destroyer. The Son of God not merely becomes the Son of man, but He assumes the likeness of sinful flesh. Not sinful flesh, nor a sinful nature; but

still flesh,—very flesh; very manhood,—manhood under the curse, in its weakness, frailty, and mortality. Moses was not commanded to take an actual serpent, a dead serpent, and hang it on the pole; that would have implied that Christ was actually sinful; but he is to do the nearest thing to this, to make the image of a serpent, formed out of brass,—such brass as the brazen altar and brazen laver were made of. Thus, as Christ was represented by the emblem of a goat on the day of atonement,—a goat, the figure of the wicked on the left of the Judge,—so is He here represented by a brazen serpent; “made a curse,” “made sin for us.” Thus on the cross, we see at once our condemnation and our pardon, our sickness and our cure, our destroyer and our deliverer. We see Christ carrying up to the cross our sin, our punishment, our enemy, and nailing them all to that cross along with Himself. God inflicts death on Him as if He were the sinner, as if He were man’s enemy, as if He were the cursed one.

II. *Christ lifted up.* The lifting up of the serpent on a pole was necessary for Israel’s cure; so the lifting up of Christ on the cross was for ours. He was lifted up,

(1.) *As a sacrifice.* He was laid on the altar. The cross was the altar on which the Lamb of God was placed.

(2.) *As a criminal.* It was a cursed place: “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” There He hung as a malefactor, the Just for the unjust!

(3.) *As an object visible to all.* The serpent was lifted up that Israel might see it; so Christ was lifted up that all men might see Him; that He might be the most visible object in creation.

III. *Christ giving life.* He hangs in the place of death, yet thence He gives life. He delivers from death by dying. Life streams out, like rivers of water, from that centre, the cross. The cross is the tree of life. There He hangs,—the life-giving One ; the healing One ; the attractive One ; the loving One. “Look unto Me,” is the voice coming from Him there. We are healed, not by working, or praying, or striving, but looking. Israel’s physicians could do nothing ; the look at the serpent did it all. So it is *in looking* that the cure comes to us. There is health, there is life at the cross. We get them simply in looking ; *all* may look. “Whosoever,” is the wide message,—“whosoever believeth,”—hath eternal life.

LIX.

THE FILLING UP OF JOY.

"This my joy therefore is fulfilled."—JOHN III. 29.

THESE are among "the last words" of John; just as he is about to step into Herod's prison. His was a brief life and ministry, yet was he the greatest among the prophets. His last words carry us back to Jacob's (Gen. xlix.), "I have waited for thy salvation"; to Moses' (Deut. xviii. 15), "A prophet shall the Lord raise"; to David's (Psalm lxxii. 20), "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended"; to Simeon's (Luke ii. 29), "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." They are the words of the martyr about to enter the prison, and to lay his neck under the sword of the executioner. They are the last words of the shortest, but perhaps most important ministry on record.

They are an answer to the jealous appeal of his own disciples. Hitherto he had been the man of the time; all crowded to him. Now the crowds were leaving him for Jesus. This tried the faith of his disciples, and roused their jealousy. "All men come to him" (ver. 26), were the words of disappointment and envy. But John has no such feeling; nor had ever said aught to produce or foster it (ver. 28).

In his answer he first tells who he is *not*. "I am not the Christ." Why wonder at the crowds now going past

me? "I am not the bridegroom," the bride belongs not to me; why wonder at the crowds flocking to the Bridegroom? Is not this just what you should expect and rejoice in? Next he tells us who he *is*. He is the *foresent* one. This is all he can say for himself. His honour is not his own, but comes from Him whom he heralds. He is the *friend* of the Bridegroom; the groomsman; like the virgins in attendance on the bride. As the foresent one he has been looking out for the Christ; should he not then rejoice that He has come? As the friend of the Bridegroom, he is watching for the Bridegroom's arrival; should he not rejoice when he hears His voice? For thus his errand terminates; his great mission is consummated; his joy fulfilled; his life no longer needed.

But the figure here used carries us back very strikingly to the Song of Solomon; chap. ii. 8, "The voice of my beloved"; ii. 10, "My beloved spake, and said"; ii. 14, "Let me hear thy voice"; v. 1, "Eat, O friends"; viii. 13, "Cause me to hear it." So with the words, bridegroom and friend. They are from the Song; and John the Baptist, no doubt, had its figures before his eye.

John's feelings are therefore just what we should have expected of a *true* man, a true friend, a true forerunner in such circumstances. *Negatively*, they are—

(1.) *Not disappointment*. His mission has not failed; he is not a disappointed man. There is no bitterness in his words.

(2.) *Not distrust*. As if he knew not whereunto all this would grow; as if he dreaded the result.

(3.) *Not envy or jealousy.* Whatever jealousy might be in his disciples, there was none in him. He envied not.

(4.) *Not pride.* It is not wounded pride that speaks in him. He is the forerunner of the meek and lowly One ; and pride has been cast out. Self-love and self-esteem have ceased. Self has passed away in the presence of the Son of God. He is content to be nothing.

But, *positively*, they are the feelings of one—

(1.) *Who admires and loves the Bridegroom.* His admiration and love are true. Hence that Bridegroom is ever uppermost in his thoughts. There is no attractiveness save in him.

(2.) *Who has been eagerly looking for Him.* In John we have the true personification of one “waiting for Christ,” “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.” And when He for whom he is looking comes, his joy is full.

(3.) *Who has actually found him.* “I found him whom my soul loveth.” “We have found the Messias.” John has found him, and rejoices.

(4.) *Whose delight is in his voice.* He long listened ; it came at length ; “the voice of my beloved” ! He stands and listens to the conversation of the marriage party,—specially of the bridegroom. It is His voice that he delights in. It is converse with Him that is his joy ; “he standeth and listeneth.”

(5.) *Whose joy is in Him alone.* All his springs are in Him. Apart from Him joy exists not to him ; nay, is an impossibility. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

(6.) *Who is content to be nothing.* “He must increase ; I must decrease.” This is no hardship. He is glad to vanish and give way to the greater and more glorious one.

Thus, in this answer we have the full acknowledgment of what John is, and of what he knows Jesus to be. What are *we*?

We are friends of the bridegroom, if believers in the name of Jesus. Friends! Like John. Like the virgins who went forth to meet Him. By nature we are friends of the world. We break with it, and become friends of the Bridegroom. We hear a good report of this Bridegroom, his love, his loveableness, his beauty, his glory, and so we betake ourselves to Him. We accept the Father’s testimony to Him ; the Holy Spirit’s testimony to his person and his work. We join ourselves to the number of his friends. He at once admits us as such.

If “friends” (as Jesus himself calls us) then the following things will mark *us* as they did John :—

I. *Admiration for Christ as the Bridegroom.* For himself as “altogether lovely” ; the perfection of beauty. We admire His person, His life, His work ; all these separately, and all of them together. We count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. We love and admire ; we admire and love. The more we know, the more we love ; the oftener we gaze, the more we admire. What think ye of Christ? Do you admire Him? Do you love Him? We love Him because He first loved us ; yes, loves us to the end, with the love that passeth knowledge.

II. *Delight in his voice.* John stood and listened as one entranced. He *heard* (as well as saw) no man save Jesus only. The TONES of his voice are sweet ; but the *words* are unutterably precious ; each word a gem, a treasure, a joy. This is my beloved Son, hear Him ! Yes, hear *Him* in these days of uproar and confusion ; hear his voice amid the chaos of human views. Say to Him, " Let me hear thy voice." His " speech is comely" ; " honey and milk are under his tongue" ; his lips " drop sweet smelling myrrh" ; his " lips drop as the honey-comb" ; " into his lips grace is poured."

III. *Joy in his glory.* He has now " increased" ; He is crowned with glory and honour. This is our joy ; yea, *in this* our joy is fulfilled. He is now blessed and glorified. And He will yet be more so when He comes again. We joy in what He is ; we joy in what He shall be. He comes to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe. Behold the Bridegroom cometh, let us go forth to meet him !

LX.

THE FULNESS OF THE SENT ONE.

“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”—JOHN III. 34, 35.

JOHN came as a witness to Jesus,—“to bear witness of the Light” (i. 7, 8). Marvellous office and honour! A spark to bear witness of the Sun! He does his work well, bearing true, full, blessed testimony to the Son of God!

He bore this testimony, that all men through him might believe (i. 7). Yet who believed his report? “No man receiveth his testimony.” They honoured him, flocked to him, spoke well of him, but received not Him of whom he testified.

Let us listen to his testimony concerning Messiah, the Word made flesh, that we may receive it, and receive Him of whom he testifies.

I. *He is the sent of God.* “The Father *sent* the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” He comes to us on a mission from the Father; He comes not of himself, nor speaks of himself. It is with the Father’s voice that He speaks; the Father’s errand that He discharges. What a link that word “sent” forms between us and God, between earth and heaven, between the sinner and the love of God. God *sends* Him, and He comes; He comes to

earth ; He comes to us ; messenger, ambassador, servant. Angels are "ministering spirits, *sent* forth to minister." But in a higher and more peculiar sense is the Son who is "sent," sent by the Father. O loving Sender, and O blessed Sent One ! Let us gladly receive the message, the messenger, and Him who sends.

II. *He is the speaker of the words of God.* He has come to "speak" ; not to keep silence ; to speak words which a man can understand ; words with a human voice, and in human language. Yet the words are the words of God ; and the speaker is from heaven ; He is divine ; and His revelation is divine ; and His words are divine,—divine though human. Let us listen to this speaker of the words of God. He speaks thus : "Repent" ; "Ye must be born again" ; "God so loved the world" ; "I am the light of the world" ; "Come unto me." Thus He spoke on earth ; and thus also He speaks from heaven : "Behold I stand," &c. For in heaven He is still the speaker of the words of God. "Hear, and your soul shall live." The words of God are perfect ; they are grace and truth ; filled with love and wisdom. Let us listen to this glorious speaker, and we shall find health and peace.

III. *He is the possessor of the Holy Spirit.* The fulness of the Spirit is *with* Him, and *in* Him ; the Spirit "without measure" has been given to Him. The Word made flesh is the Messiah, the anointed One. Through the eternal Spirit, He spoke, and acted, and lived, and died. The Spirit without measure is given Him. This fulness He possesses for us ; for His church ; He is the *possessor* and the *dispenser* of the Holy Ghost. Let us welcome

Him, and deal with Him as such. It is for us that the Father has filled Him. There is enough in His fulness for us. We need not be empty so long as He is full, nor poor so long as He is rich.

IV. *He is the object of the Father's love.* "The Father loveth the Son." This love of the Father to the Son is the greatest of all. There is none like it. It is perfect, in finite, eternal, divine, passing all knowledge. Never before had there been such an object for the Father to love ; so glorious, so loveable ; so full of all created and uncreated excellencies. This love of the Father to the Son, is the foundation of His treatment of us. He deals with us according to this love. It is the greatness of this love that makes Him so desirous of blessing us ; because in blessing us, He is honouring the beloved Son. Thus He gratifies his love to the Son by blessing us. What security for blessing does this give us ! It is not simply His love to us that makes Him so long to bless us, but his love to his own Son. We might suspect His love to ourselves, and say, How can we count upon blessing ? but we cannot suspect His love to his Son, so that we may boldly say, We are sure of blessing, because we are sure that the Father loveth the Son. Let these words sink into our hearts, "The Father loveth the Son."

V. *He is the heir of all things.* The Father hath given all things into his hand. He is head over all things ; He is Lord of all ; He is King of kings ; He is judge of all. He hath put all things under His feet, and left nothing that is not put under Him. He is the head of principalities and powers. This universal authority and dominion is

the consequence of the Father's love. It is thus that God honours Him, and shews that He is the man whom He delights to honour. All things are given into His hand, because He is the beloved of the Father. Nothing in heaven, or earth, or hell is beyond His sway. He is the blessed and only Potentate.

Learn then,

(1.) *A sinner's refuge.* Christ Jesus ; the sent of God ; the speaker of the words of God's love ; the possessor of all power. Go straight to him, O man ! There is safety in Him, but in no other. He is willing to bless ; able to save to the uttermost. He can deliver you from every sin and enemy. You have all in Him. Go to Him now ; as you are ; with all your worthlessness and evil.

(2.) *A saint's security.* The church of God, and each saint of God, is daily exposed to peril. All things are against us. But in Him whom the Father loved we have a strong tower, a refuge in the time of trouble. Who shall prevail against those whom Christ has undertaken to protect ?

LXI.

THE LIVING WATER GOD'S FREE GIFT.

“Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”—JOHN IV. 10.

THE three Persons of the Godhead are here. The expression “the gift of *God*” shews the Father; the living water is the Holy Ghost (John vii. 36), and the Son of God is the speaker.

The love of God shines brightly in this verse,—the love of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—love to the chief of sinners, love that seeks and saves the lost. Every word here is love; love that many waters cannot quench; love that passeth knowledge. Sin abounds, but grace superabounds.

The interest which God takes in *individual souls* is seen vividly here. The three thousand at Pentecost tell us something quite different from this. This is Godhead stooping down to visit and care for one solitary soul; it is the good Shepherd casting his eye on a stray sheep by the wayside, and stooping to pick it up and carry it off on his shoulders.

The way in which God meets with the sinner is shewn us here. God deals with him alone, and face to face; God speaks to the sinner and the sinner speaks to God. There

must always be this close personal dealing, this individual transaction of the soul's business for eternity, this settlement of the question between man and God ; not in a crowd, but alone ; not through the medium or intervention of another,—friend, or priest, or church,—but directly and alone.

The time and place and circumstances of such a meeting are brought before us. *Any* day, *any* hour, will do. Not the set hour of morning or evening sacrifice, but *any* time will do. And *any* *place* will do. Not the temple merely, or the closet, but a well-side, as here, or a sycamore tree (as Zaccheus), a tax-gatherer's office (as Matthew). Yes ; *any* time, *any* place, will do for Jesus. His grace is not circumscribed by temple walls, nor tied to ceremonies, nor limited to hours. Samaria, Jericho, Tyre, Jerusalem are the same to Him. The temple, the highway, the hill-side, the sea-beach, the synagogue, the house, the boat, the grave-yard, are all alike to Him and to his grace.

The meeting looks a *chance*-one, but it is not so. In God's eternal purpose that place had been fixed upon,—that well. And Jesus comes to it as the fulfiller of the Father's will, the accomplisher of his purposes, in the minutest jot and tittle. He was seeking one of those whom the Father had given Him, when He travelled that forenoon, and sat down at length, wearied, by the well. It was not the woman seeking Christ, but Christ seeking the woman. She came for one thing, He gives another. She came in quest of the earthly ; He gives the heavenly. She knew not Him nor cared for Him ; He knew and

cared for her. In spite of sin, and unbelief, and hard heartedness, He draws near to her, lays hold of her, wins her to Himself, and then, after all his *weariness*, "*rests* in his love."

Yes ; Christ was weary, and it is thus that He *rests*. Do *we* find our rest where *He* found *his*? He was hungry and thirsty, and here He found both meat and drink. Do we satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst where He did? The doing of the Father's will, the gathering in of the lost one, was to Him rest, and meat, and drink. Is it thus that we find refreshment? Is it thus that we eat and drink?

When Jacob dug this well, how little he thought of what was to be transacted here in after ages ; *who* was to sit here ; what eternal words were to be spoken here ; and that here a soul was to be saved, and from this spot joy was to be caused in heaven. In building a sanctuary we naturally think of who may be born here ; but who, in digging a well, would ever think of such a thing, or dream of inscribing on it, "this man and that man was born here."

But we have here (1) the gift of God ; (2) the bringer of it ; (3) man's ignorance of these ; (4) God's way of bestowing it.

I. *The gift of God.* God has more gifts than one. Christ is his gift ; the Holy Spirit is his gift ; eternal life is his gift. Sometimes two of these gifts are conjoined ; This is the true God and eternal life" ; "in Him was life" ; "I am the life." So that we may take the words here as having this reference, "If thou knewest God's

gift of eternal life in me,—me who now ask for water,—thou wouldst have asked of me, and I would have given thee that Holy Spirit, who is the living water, and through whom the eternal life is poured into the dead soul.” Yes ; the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord ! “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son” !

II. *The Bringer of it.* It is “He who saith to thee give me to drink.” This weary, hungry, thirsty Jew is the Bringer of the glorious gift. In Him is life ! All fulness of life dwells in Him. He, this Jesus, this man like ourselves, He has come down from the Father filled with this eternal life for us. Could it be brought nearer ? placed more within our reach than thus it is in Him ?

III. *Man's ignorance of it.* The woman did not know the gift nor its Bringer. She had no sense of its value, or of her need of Him. The life that now is she knew, but not the life that is to come. The water of Jacob's well she prized, but not the water from the eternal well. Such is man every where ! He knows not God ; nor the love of God ; nor the gift of God ; nor the Son of God.

IV. *God's way of bestowing his gifts.* “Thou wouldst have asked ; and He would have given.” This is all ! How simple, how easy, how near, how free ! Living water ! This is what the Son of God has to bestow. Living water ! That is the Holy Spirit (John vii. 39). For blessing we must have to do with Jesus. It is in communicating with Him that we receive what we need. There must be direct application on our part ; direct bestowal on his. But how close at hand is this divine

life! How welcome are we to have it from the hands of the Son of God. This living water He would pour into us at once, and without upbraiding. Ask, and ye shall receive. "I will give to him that is athirst."

There is something in the expression "if thou knewest," that makes the gracious announcement here yet more gracious. It is the same as in Luke xix., "if thou hadst known," or "would that thou hadst known." It is the Saviour yearning over the needy and the thirsty. Oh that you would come to me for living water!

This is one out of the many memorable texts often quoted and preached upon; such as, "God so loved the world"; "Come unto me"; "It is a faithful saying"; "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." *Any* of these might well be enough to win the human heart; how much more all of them together.

LXII.

BIBLE TESTIMONY TO JESUS, AND MAN'S
REFUSAL OF IT.

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”—JOHN V. 39, 40.

IN opposition to the denial and disbelief of the Jews, the Son of God produces his “witnesses.” He has many, but He calls only four,—John the Baptist, his own miracles, the Father, the Scriptures. These all testify of Him before men, that they may believe and be saved. It is the last of these that we have to consider, as here put by our Lord, to meet the unbelief of Israel and to establish his own claims.

I. *The Scriptures.* God has “spoken” (“thus saith the Lord”); and God has “written” (“it is written”). That which He has spoken and written make up what we call “the Bible,” or “the Book,” which Paul calls “Scripture” (2 Tim. iii. 16), which our Lord here calls “the Scriptures,” or the “Writings.” He has spoken by human lips and written by human pens, yet all that is thus given to us is divine, superhuman, supernatural. The thoughts are the thoughts of God, and the words are the words of God. That our Lord should refer to them to prove his Sonship and his Messiahship, shews the stress which He laid upon them, the divine accuracy which He ascribed to

them. It is with confidence in their *accuracy* that He appeals to them. If the *words* are inaccurate or unintelligible ; if they are but the results of man's efforts to clothe divine thoughts in human language, then the demonstration goes for nothing, the proof fails ; Jesus may not, after all, be what the *words* imply that He is,—the Son of the Highest. If the *words* be not of God, there is no security for the *thoughts* ; if the words are not correct, the thoughts extracted from these words are not to be relied upon as God's ; and if the words be incorrect, and the thoughts doubtful, we have no "Scripture," no "Bible." The one fragment of the supposed superhuman has been stripped of its divine glory.

II. *The search.* The word "search" is the same as is used concerning God as the searcher of hearts, and implies the thoroughness of the search. In our translation this is a command,—*"Search the Scriptures,"*—bringing out an admirable meaning. But it may be, "Ye search" ; and this accords better with the argument of the speaker, and with the state of those to whom he was speaking. The Jews were great searchers of the Scriptures. They had profound reverence for the word of God. They never made any question as to its accuracy or verbal inspiration. They were almost superstitious in the way they affixed meanings, not to words only, but to letters. Our Lord appeals to them as searchers of the word,—careful and reverential searchers of the word. They had, in truth, no other book to search. Their literature was almost wholly divine. We are overwhelmed with books ; and hence in the matter of "searching" we

come far behind old Israel. It would be well for us to study, to search, to reverence the book of God,—the one fragment of the supernatural which exists on earth,—the record of divine utterances, the exponent of the mind of God.

III. *The reason of the search.* “Ye are persuaded that in them ye have eternal life.” It was not in mere curiosity that Israel searched the word, though they did so in much ignorance and unbelief. They had some idea of the hidden treasure that was there. They knew, or professed to know, that not only was knowledge there, but life was there; that God had given them his book, that by it they might obtain life. Yes; in that book is life;—eternal life. It is the revelation of life;—of the living one;—of Him who said not only, I am the way and the truth, but the LIFE. We search in this book for *life*! Other things, no doubt, are there; this but especially. For other things we dig into this wondrous mine of heavenly gold; but above all for this,—the life that is deposited there. Its truths are living truths; its words are living words,—“The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.”

IV. *The divine testimony.* “They are the scriptures which testify of me.” No other writing contains a testimony to Messiah.” There are books many, and speakers many; and in their utterances we hear of gods many and lords many; but only one book contains a testimony to the Christ of God. We have philosophers, poets, logicians, orators, but no witnesses for the Son of God. Augustine admired Cicero, but after his conversion he

lost his relish, for the name of Christ was not there. Only of one book can it be said "it testifies of me." Yes; the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy and of all Scripture. The theme of the book is Messiah; the seed of the woman; the seed of Abraham; the star out of Jacob; the prophet like unto Moses; the righteous One; the tender plant; the righteous King. It is one unbroken testimony to the Christ and his sacrificial work that we get in this volume. The testifier is the Holy Ghost (John xv. 26). It is His voice we hear throughout Scripture speaking of Jesus. It is His testimony that is presented to us as the resting place for our faith; for when God bids us believe, He gives the fullest and surest evidence for us to rest our faith upon. Wherever, then, we turn in Scripture, we find Jesus. There He is all in all; the alpha and the omega of every book. It is the light of Jesus that is diffused through every page. It is the glory of Jesus that we find in all its revelations. He is everywhere in that volume; and He is so in connection with eternal life; in connection with the undoing of the sentence of death passed against our race. The first Adam comes before us at the beginning; but he is the introducer of *death*; with his name and doings only death is linked. But he soon passes away, and in his place there comes the "second man," the "last Adam," the giver of life, nay, **THE LIFE**. And over all Scripture the quickening, life-giving fragrance of His name is diffused. Christ and life; life in Christ; Christ our life;—these form the very essence, the sum and burden, of the Scriptures. "They are they that testify of me."

V. *Human perversity.* "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Here is rejection of the Christ; refusal of the life; deliberate standing aloof from the fountain of life; professing to seek the life, yet disjoining that life from the living one; turning away from that living one, when in the form of true humanity he stood before them presenting to them this life of God; pressing to their parched lips the full cup of living water from God's eternal fountain.

(1.) *There is life for the dead.* The Bible assumes that the world is dead; that it needs life; that nothing less than life will meet its case. It speaks of life; proclaims life; reveals its fulness. O dead in sin, there is life for you!

(2.) *This life is in Christ.* Only in Him. None anywhere else. In Him is life, and the life is the light of men. All else is death. "The last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. xv. 45).

(3.) *Life is to be had by coming to Christ.* Come and live, He says, just as He said, Come and rest. Inter-course with Him is the only source of life. Nothing more is needed; nothing less will do. Are not men trying to do with something less than this? Something less than conversion, less than the Spirit's work, less than the blood and righteousness and salvation of the Son of God!

(4.) *Want of life is the result of our own deliberate refusal to deal with Christ.* We need not try to throw the blame on God's sovereignty or the need of divine power. These do not alter our responsibility, nor make it less true that we have deliberately rejected the Christ of God and refused his gift of life.

LXIII.

NIGHT WITH JESUS.

“And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum: and it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.”—

JOHN VI. 17.

MANY a dark night has rested over this sea of Tiberias unrecorded. Many a storm has swept it; many an earthquake has convulsed it; many a wave has risen and fallen o'er its blue expanse; many a scene and hour of danger its steep hills have witnessed; all unrecorded; passing away in silence. But here is one night, of which record has been kept; one blast written down in history; one storm made memorable for ever. At what exact part of that lake the occurrence took place we know not; it must have been somewhere towards the north, where Capernaum lay. Let us read this brief record, and learn its everlasting lesson.

1. *It was night.* The sun had long set over the western steeps of Tiberias. Darkness was over all. The distant twinkling of the city-lights in Capernaum or Chorazin was all that broke the gloom. Yes, it was night, and the disciples were alone. The Master was away. Jesus had not come to them. This made it double night.

2. *It was night at sea.* Not indeed a sea broad and wide, like that which swept round Jonah, and wrecked Paul;

but deep and wide enough for danger. They had left the green slopes, where they had been all day with their Master (v. 10). To shorten their journey, by cutting off the north-eastern bend of the lake, they had taken ship ; but night had overtaken them ere they had gone far ; midnight had fallen, and they must row through the thick gloom over the eight or ten miles that lay between them and the northern shore. Besides, they were alone. Jesus had not come ! They had looked for his joining them ere they embarked ; and they were looking for Him still, expecting Him by some other boat ; but He had not arrived. To be without Him on land, and by day, was sad ; but to be without Him at sea, and by night, was sadder still.

3. *It was a night of toil.* They had rowed some thirty furlongs,—about four miles,—but they had as many more before them ; and it was severe toil after the incessant bustle of such a day as they had spent in feeding the multitudes. They were alone. The Master's presence would have cheered them ; and, no doubt, as He had often done, He would have taken the oar along with them, weary as He might be. But He was not with them. They were toiling at the oar in this dark night, and Jesus had not come to them. This made their labour doubly hard, their weariness doubly sore.

4. *It was a night of danger.* “The sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.” The storm had broken loose, and was rushing down from the mountains upon them ; the waves were heaving round them and dashing over them. Peril encompassed them. Perhaps they were

saying one to another, had the Master been here this storm would not have arisen, as if they would reproach Him for delay, forgetful that distance was nothing to Him. They were alone in this tempest. Jesus had not come to them. This made the storm seem more terrible. Had He been with them, even though He were asleep on the pillow, it would have calmed and cheered them. But He had not come!

How much of trouble and despondency may have filled the hearts of the disciples on that night, we know not. The words certainly imply something of these,—“it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.” His delay was a trial of faith. It looked neglectful and unkind. They might be ready to say, “Master, carest thou not that we perish.” But He loves to *try*, not to *break*, their faith. He will not try it beyond what they can bear. He tries it only to strengthen it.

Let us look at these words in their more general aspect, as relating to the history of each saint and of the church at large. (1.) Night. (2.) Night without Jesus. (3.) Night with Jesus. (4.) Day with Jesus.

1. *Night.* All have their nights. The sinner's history is all one long starless night. But the saint has his night too; his night of sorrow, of bereavement, of pain. The Church, too, has her night. She is “not of the night”; but she has “nights.” Darkness, tempest, danger, are around about. Persecution, poverty, desertion; “famine, and nakedness, and peril, and sword.” She has had many such nights, and will have them until her King arrives. There shall be no night then. But there is night now.

2. *Night without Jesus.* The sinner's night is altogether without Jesus ; nay, this is the very gloom of its darkness. But the saint has nights in which Jesus seems distant. "By night upon my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth. I sought Him, but I found Him not." Without Him *altogether* he cannot be ; for the promise is, "Lo, I am with you always." But there are times of sorrow, weakness, suffering, when He is not realised. And though the issue of these is to bring Him nearer, yet for a time He seems absent. The bond is not broken, but the joy is not tasted. The Church, too, has her nights of weariness and persecution in which He seems to stand aloof. It is dark, and He comes not.

3. *Night with Jesus.* His presence is everything. It cannot indeed make it *not* night ; but it makes the night to seem as day. With Him the darkness is as the light. For having Him we have, (1.) Companionship ; (2.) Protection ; (3.) Safety ; (4.) Comfort ; (5.) Strength ; (6.) Assurance of coming day. With these may we not rejoice in the night ? It is the night that draws out these blessings ; that makes Jesus more suitable, more necessary. Blessed night that introduces us more fully into the fellowship of Jesus.

4. *Day with Jesus.* Hitherto it has been night ; yet during it the Church has had the Master's presence ; "Lo, I am with you always." It has been good for her, indeed, to have Him with her during the world's darkness. But He does not leave her when the day breaks. He does not say, Let me go, for the day breaketh. More than ever shall He be with her during the long day of glory

which is at hand. "So shall we ever be with the Lord"! He with us, and we with Him. And if his presence made night not only endurable but even pleasant, what will not that presence make the coming day!

LXIV.

THE BREAD OF IMMORTALITY.

“ This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.”—JOHN VI. 50.

THERE are four points here which form the sum of our Lord's statement : (1.) the bread ; (2.) the coming down ; (3.) the eating ; (4.) the not dying. But before taking up these, mark in the wondrous gift here referred to, (1.) the great love of God ; yes, “ Herein is love ” ; (2.) the wisdom of God, providing the right food for hungry souls ; (3.) the power of God, imparting to that food its nourishing properties ; or rather, giving effect to these properties in causing them to nourish us ; making that bread omnipotent, so that no amount of human hunger can withstand it. We cannot think of the gift without calling these things to mind ; the gift carrying us back and up to the love, the wisdom, the power of the giver ; nay, embodying these in all their fulness. The giver of the bread is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. *The bread.* Bread is that which feeds the *body* ; nourishes it, strengthens it, makes it grow. Without it, weakness comes, disease, and death. It is of bread for the *soul* that the Lord here speaks ; of something that will sustain the life of the soul ; nay, make it grow. He announces *Himself* as that thing. Not some truth of

doctrine, but HIMSELF ; the Word made flesh ; very man and very God ; His whole and complete person ; not the manhood without the Godhead, nor the Godhead without the manhood ; but His *person*, God man. *He* is the bread ; not merely bread, but *the* bread ; the one true bread ; without whom the soul cannot grow, nor its life be sustained ; for only by generous diet can such sickly souls be nourished. As such (no less than as the sin-bearer), he is despised and rejected of men (our soul loatheth this light food) : yet none the less is He necessary to the soul as its food, its bread. Out of Him ; apart from His person, there is no nourishment, no sustenance. He feeds ; He alone ; He feeds us on *Himself*. All else is husks, or mere air and vapour. He alone is bread ; He, the Christ of God ; He, the eternal Word and Son ; He, God manifest in flesh ; He, in His glorious person, is our food ; His flesh is meat indeed. That which His person reveals to us of Godhead,—of God, and the love of God ; of God, and the wisdom, power, righteousness, majesty, and grace of God,—is *bread*, the bread of the soul ; the true bread and sustenance of creaturehood ; the hidden manna ; better than angels' food ; “the corn of heaven” (Ps. lxxviii. 24) ; the divine provision for the love and nourishment of humanity. Our Lord applies various names to it : (1.) “bread from heaven” ; (2.) “true bread” ; (3.) “the bread of God” ; (4.) “bread of life” ; (5.) “living bread.” All these are names indicative of its excellence, its power, its suitableness. It is the very bread we need ; no other would do ; only Immanuel's person ; the Son of God *Himself*. This is the true *unleavened* bread ;

holy and incorruptible. The curse is not in it, but only the blessing. The Word made flesh is the soul's eternal food.

II. *The coming down.* In one aspect this bread came "up" as well as "came down"; the human part coming up, the divine part coming down. But as it is the divine part that gives all its vitality and power of nourishment to it, so it is said, as a whole, to come down from heaven. The word is such as to refer to past, present, and future. (1.) It came down; (2.) it is coming down; (3.) it will continue to come down. In the first promise, it came down; in all subsequent ones, it did the same. It specially came down when the Word was made flesh. That was the great descent of the divine bread; the like of which had not been in our world, nor can be in any other form. It was the bringing down of the granary and storehouse of heaven to earth. That storehouse is inexhaustible; ever accessible; its contents may be said to be either always open to us here on earth, or to be always coming down. In either aspect we see a perpetual supply; a never-failing fulness; ever-present bread; like the manna, ready for us each morning; in double amount each Sabbath; in seven-fold amount each communion. Let us open our mouth wide. Alas for our want of appetite! There is bread enough and to spare, but we have no relish for it; we do not hunger for it. Hence our leanness; the poverty of our blood; the paleness of countenance; the feebleness of our limbs. We do not feed on it sufficiently. What different Christians should we be did we fully partake of it as God presents it. Eat, O friends! Eat, and live;

eat, and be strong ; eat, and be in health ; eat, and go forth to do the work of God. Not on earth will you find the eternal bread ; the bread which feeds the immortal spirit. Only in Him who came down from heaven,—the Christ of God.

III. *The eating.* Faith eats, and fills the soul ; unbelief refuses to eat, and so starves us. We eat *by*, and in believing. We take into our souls the words of the Holy Ghost concerning this bread ; concerning Him who is the bread ; and in doing so, we feed on *it* ; we feed on *Him*. We receive His body, we take His flesh into our mouth, not in some carnal or mystical way, but in taking in the testimony, in studying and receiving the truth,—the divine words are food : “Thy words were found, and I did eat them” ; but the special word which we eat, and by which we are nourished, is the word concerning Him who came down from heaven, the Christ of God, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. God bids us *eat*. He does not say, “Lest they put forth the hand, and take of the tree, and eat, and live for ever” ; He commands us to do this ; “put forth the hand, take, eat, and live for ever.”

IV. *The not dying.* All food is for the production and sustaining of life. The tree of life indicated this. We are to eat that we may live. Immortality is maintained by the provision which God has made for its upholding. This immortality corresponds to the food which produces and nourishes it. Ours is a divine immortality : “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it *more abundantly*. Christ’s flesh is life to us. It quickens

us. We eat it, and live for ever. It is the bread *without leaven*; without anything in it that can weaken or corrupt; but everything fitted to produce immortality, and incorruptibility. The expression, "*and not die*," refers specially to the death of those who did eat the desert-manna. That manna could not keep them from dying; but this hidden manna can. We may, however, connect the words here with those in Genesis, "In the day thou eatest thereof *thou shalt surely die*." To eat of that tree of Paradise was fatal. Death must follow. To eat of this better tree, this heavenly bread, is not fatal; is not mortal; nay, it is life-giving. To eat it is not to die, but to live. Nay, there is no life, save in eating it. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt not die, but live. Eat and live, is our message to a dead world.

The expression, "that a man," should rather be, that "any one," may eat thereof. It is not a mere statement, but an invitation,—to all that this hungry, famished world contains. Israel only had the manna; to the world is offered this better bread. "Any one," is God's message! "Whosoever"; "every one"! God places this bread in the world, and bids all eat of it. Empty, starving world, come and partake! "Bread enough and to spare" (Luke xv. 17), is God's message. There is enough for all and each. It is free to every one. "My flesh I give for the life of the world." There is no restriction, no exclusion, Any one! Ah surely, O man, that takes thee in; as thou art,—a poor prodigal, starving on husks. Oh, eat and live.

LXV.

CHRIST'S FLESH THE WORLD'S LIFE.

"My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."—JOHN

VI. 51.

OF the Word, the eternal Word of God, it is said, "In Him was life" (John i. 4). It was as the Word, or Son, that He was *the life*. In Him, as the second Person of the Godhead, is the infinite fountainhead of life.

But between Him and us there is a great gulf. This divine well of life is inaccessible to us so long as "the Word" remains simply "the Word." For the communication of the life, He must be something more than the Word. The fountain is infinite; but it is unapproachable by us. We cannot climb to the heaven of heavens. A well must be dug on earth into which the heavenly waters may flow, so as to be within our reach. Earth cannot ascend to heaven; heaven must descend to earth, bringing with it all its riches of life.

"The Word was made FLESH;" and thus life was brought down to us. A man, with flesh and blood such as we have, was made the depository or storehouse of the life. As "the Word" he was the life; but only as "the Word made flesh" is He *our* life. As the Son of God he is "light;" but only as the God-man is he the "light of the world," the "light of men." It is as the Word made

flesh that He speaks when He says, "The bread that I will give is my *flesh*, which I will give as the life of the world;" and again, when He says, "My *flesh* is meat indeed; . . . except ye eat the *flesh* and drink the *blood* of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you."

But meat of itself does not *produce* or *commence* life; it only sustains and nourishes it. Dead men cannot eat; the dead body digests no food, however excellent. But He who is the Word made *flesh* *actively* quickens, as well as *passively* feeds. "The Son quickeneth whom He will." As the Creator of the universe, He speaks and it is done; He creates all things new. From himself goes forth directly the quickening power by which souls are raised from the dead. And having been made alive from the dead, they begin to feed on Him,—and find in this meat their daily life, and strength, and growth.

Thus He is "the life of the world." It is as "the world's life" that we have fellowship with Him. It is as "the world's life" that faith recognises Him and rejoices in Him. "Christ our life"! This is our watchword and experience. To say that Christ is our life is not only to say there is life in Christ for me, but that life is flowing down for me and into me. It is just such life as we need in all respects, recovering and refreshing the soul; not only rescuing it from the death of condemnation, but acting with resurrection-power in restoring it to right spiritual feeling and action. It is life which, when it comes in, fills up the void within as well as comes down like rain upon the mown grass, and like showers that water the earth. It is life most full and ample; it is life

abiding and unbroken ; it is life undeserved and unpurchased ; it is life which no power of death nor influence of disease can affect or impair.

I. *It is connection with Christ that brings the life into us.* Cut the wires of the electric telegraph, and all communication ceases between city and city. Restore them, and the intercourse is resumed ; the current flows again. So, it is connection with Christ our life that vitalizes, quickens us spiritually. He is in heaven, and we are upon the earth ; but the greatness of distance matters not, provided there be connection, the connection, as it were, of a single wire. That single wire is faith. This is the one connecting medium. Not love, nor holiness, nor goodness, nor earnestness, but faith, simple faith. Our belief of the divine testimony concerning the Christ of God is the one thing that links us to Him. Other things follow upon this ; but they are not the connecting wire. Faith, as the only grace which admits of being thoroughly insulated and separated from earthly things, is the true and only conducting wire. Unbelief is the great non-conducting medium which arrests, in a moment, all communication between heaven and earth. Faith only restores this,—establishing the surest and most blessed of all connections between Christ and the soul, between heaven and earth.

II. *It is connection with Christ that continues the life.* The life is not like a treasure of gold brought to us, and deposited with us, to serve us for a lifetime. It is not like a lake or cistern of water formed within us, rendering us independent of all without us. It is something laid up

for us in heaven, and transmitted down to earth, hour by hour, as light is deposited in the sun, and at each successive moment emitted from him to us. The connection between us and Christ must be kept up unbroken, else the life in us will fail. It is not said, he that "*hath* believed," but he "that *believeth*," hath everlasting life. There is a well near Jerusalem, called by the Arabs Bar Eyub, and by the Jews the well of Nehemiah, which is chiefly fed by the rain. When the showers fall abundantly, and the Kedron flows like a river, this well is filled and the city rejoices. But this is only once or twice in the year. But there is a deep well underneath the temple, which is fed by water from the great pools of Solomon, near Bethlehem. This is always full, being fed from a perennial spring whose waters fail not. Only when the aqueduct is broken which leads the water along, mile after mile, into Jerusalem, can this temple-cistern fail. Such is to be the manner of our life. It is not like the inconstant well fed by an intermitting stream; but like the great temple cistern, ever full, because fed from a never failing spring. Faith is the aqueduct that brings the water from the pools of our true Solomon into us his spiritual temples. Every moment this divine aqueduct should be discharging the waters of life into our souls from the unfailing fountain above. By day and night, in calm or storm, through gardens or barren hillsides, that stream flows on, and shall flow on for ever! Time has broken Solomon's aqueduct and interrupted the communication between the fountain and the temple-cistern, but no time can break the connection between us and the

heavenly fountain ; for who shall separate us from the love of Christ? "Because I live, ye shall live also." Thus the soul is kept always full and fresh.

III. *Connection with Christ introduces us into the everlasting life hereafter.* For the present is but the earnest of the coming life. It is into a glorious flower that the present bud expands ; and its future expansion it owes to that same connection which quickened it and nourished it here. For faith is the substance of things hoped for ; and it is into these "things hoped for" that faith introduces us at last. The fulness of the life is yet to come. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." And it is for eternal life and glory that our present course of faith on earth is the preparation. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" ; but we know that the future life of vision, into which the present life of faith is leading us, will be as unutterably blessed and glorious as it is abiding and everlasting.

Such is the beginning, the middle, and the end, or at least the consummation, of this life. And this threefold blessing is linked with the one thing—faith. Our belief of the divine testimony concerning Christ, our life, is the one connecting link or line between the past, the present, and the future of our better life. He that believeth hath Christ for his life, now, and for evermore. He that hath the Son hath the life ; and he that hath the life, the adoption ; and he that hath the adoption, hath the kingdom and the glory.

This connection with the living One, with Christ our life, works in many ways. Having been thus brought to

the life, or rather the life having been brought into us, every thing about us partakes of this life. As every part of the flower or tree gets the sap, so every part of our being gets this life out of the divine fulness of life deposited in the living One. Our religion becomes a living religion ; our prayers living prayers ; our praises living praises ; our service living service ; our words living words ; our labour living labour : our whole being is now pervaded with life, spiritual life, divine life. How different every thing is now to us ! For it is life that looses our bondage and brings in the liberty. It is life that casts out the darkness and fills us with light. It is life that gives us eyes to see, and ears to hear, and feet to run in the heavenly way. The coming in of Christ, our life, is the new creation of the man ! And what is there that that new creation will not work within us !

This life is that of the Word made flesh. It is a new and divine life ; for we are “made partakers of the divine nature” ; we are “made partakers of Christ.” And it is as if the same blood that flowed through his veins flowed through ours. It is not a restoration to us of the first Adam’s life ; it is the impartation of a far higher life from the second Adam ; for the first Adam was made a living soul, but the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Nor is it simply the flesh or body of Christ that is our life, but that flesh or body broken. It is not merely an incarnate Christ, but an incarnate Christ crucified ! That flesh of the Son of man, in order to be the food of our souls, must be bruised ! And that in which we find our food and life is the broken body and shed blood of the

Lord. On this flesh and blood we feed when we receive the Father's witness concerning it, and dwell upon the truths which that testimony contains. Thus Christ's flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.

Consider this life under the following aspects and bearing :—

1. *It is life from the dead.* Like Lazarus, we are dead and buried. The living voice of the Word made flesh speaks to us and says, Come forth. We hear it and obey. We arise from the dead at the call of Him who is the resurrection and the life. This is conversion. This is the new birth ; a resurrection from the dead.

2. *It is life in the midst of death.* From the day of conversion the life is like a spark in the midst of a stormy sea, or like our body exposed to the polar frost. Everything is against its continuance ; and, were it not divine, it could not remain. But it is divine ; and maintains its vigour in the midst of a world of death.

3. *It is life in death.* On a death-bed the life shines out in its brightness ; and when death seizes us, this life remains untouched. Over it the last enemy has no power. Nor can the grave extinguish it. It is life which survives mortality and corruption ; life which defies the tomb ; life which he, who has the power of death, cannot reach.

4. *It is resurrection life.* For a while it becomes invisible, while soul and body are parted. But it soon re-kindles, or rather re-appears, like a returning star, as soon as soul and body are re-united. It never indeed leaves the soul, even when the body crumbles down. But

it remains unseen by us till the resurrection-day. Then it rises like a sun,—a sun to shine for ever! When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.

Take these lessons :

(1.) *Despise not this life.* Some have too long slighted it. Trifle no more with a thing so glorious.

(2.) *Receive it now.* For this we make known the divine testimony ; for it is with our reception of it that the life is connected.

(3.) *Cherish it evermore.* Let it reign within you, triumphing over death ; and making you feel, and act, and speak as living men !

(4.) *Anticipate the resurrection day.* Then we shall know that life in a way such as we have never known it here. It will be infinitely fuller, more blessed, and more glorious !

LXVI.

COME AND DRINK.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."—JOHN VII. 37.

HERE we note, (1.) the time; (2.) the place; (3.) the giver; (4.) the gift; (5.) the persons; (6.) the love.

I. *The time.* The last and great day of the feast of tabernacles; when Israel's joy was fullest; at least in appearance and expression; just when men would have thought there was least need of any other joy; and no propriety in diverting their minds from the scene before them; when many days of religious service would have seemed quite enough to fill them. Just then the voice is heard and the message strikes on their ear, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

II. *The place.* Jerusalem,—the temple. What need of anything else than what that temple afforded. Was not David's experience still true, "How amiable are thy tabernacles"; "I was glad when they said to me." Besides, the temple was now filled with crowds; and a scene was enacting in its courts of striking aspect. The Levite was now bringing in the water from Siloam in the golden pitcher, or pouring it on the sacrifice; and Israel was

about to burst forth in one loud shout of joy. Imposing scene and place !

III. *The giver.* It is the Son of God who stands up in the midst of these ten thousands ; with something in his hand for them ; something which he counts worthy of their acceptance. The giver is divine and heavenly ; not merely a prophet or teacher sent from God, but the Son of God himself ; who knew what they needed, and what He had to give ; who saw into their hearts ; had sounded their depths of emptiness ; had measured the intensity of their thirst. He is himself God's gift ; yet He is also giver ; the dispenser of a fulness which is absolutely infinite. To *himself* he turns their eye,—here as always elsewhere. "Come unto *me*." They were dealing with other things or persons ; he bids them deal with himself. Feasts, altars, sacrifices, doctrines, ceremonies, were all in vain ; they must deal with himself.

IV. *The gift.* Living water ; something wherewith to quench their thirst ; the Holy Spirit. Here is a gift in Christ's hands for them ; a divine gift from a divine giver ; a gift sufficient to fill the soul of the emptiest, to quench the thirst of the thirstiest ; a gift not only great enough to fill them, but to overflow upon others ; a gift personal, infinite, free. There are two gifts of God which stand aloft and alone in their priceless greatness,—the gift of his Son, the gift of his Spirit ; both of these presented to man, pressed upon him : "If thou knewest the gift of God, thou wouldst have asked and he would have given thee living water."

V. *The Persons.* Who are they who need this living

water? Not heathens; not profane and irreligious; but *Jews*; religious Jews; engaged in the worship of God, at one of their most joyful feasts. This is remarkable. In the fourth chapter it is to the Samaritan that he presents the cup of living water. In the book of the Revelation, it is offered indiscriminately to all, Jew and Gentile. So also in the fifty-fifth of Isaiah. But here it is to the Jew, the religious Jew. He is the thirsty one, he needs living water. His rites, and feasts, and sacrifices cannot fill him, nor quench his thirst. He has still a deep void within,—an intense thirst, which calls for something more spiritual and divine. It is not then to the idolatrous pagan that the Lord speaks; not merely to the lover of pleasure or lust; the heedless sinner. It is to the men who frequent the sanctuary,—who pray and praise outwardly; who go to the Lord's table. It is to them He speaks. Perhaps the thirstiest of our race are to be found among our so-called religious men,—and I do not mean the hypocrite or pharisee,—but those who, with devout conscientiousness, attend to what are called religious duties in all their parts. They go through the whole round and routine of service, but they are not happy. They are still thirsty and weary. This external religiousness helps to pacify conscience, but it does not make them happy. Sabbath comes after Sabbath, and finds them in their place in the sanctuary, but they are not happy. It is a form or a performance; an empty vessel. They are just where they were. There are multitudes of such in our day; in our churches; at our communion tables. To them Jesus speaks, "If any man thirst, let

him come to *me* and drink." Duties, ceremonies, and performances cannot make you happy. They are a weariness. They leave you often more thirsty than before. But deal with Jesus, as God's gift, as the dispenser of God's gift,—you will find in Him the fountain of living water.

VI. *The love.* It is all love, from first to last. In love Jesus stands up and speaks. In love He presents the full vessel of living water, and presses it to their parched lips. Here is the love that passeth knowledge ; love yearning over unhappy man, and pitying his unhappiness. Come ye to the waters ! Come, and quench your thirst. Come, and be full ! Come, and be happy for evermore !

LXVII.

JESUS OUR LIGHT.

"And every man went unto his own house."—JOHN VII. 53. *Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. . . . Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*"—JOHN VIII. I, 12.

IF we group together the scenes of this and the succeeding chapter, we might head them thus,—a *day* with Jesus; in which we have not merely his answers to the disputing Jews, but his proclamation of love; a *night* with Jesus on the Mount of Olives; *dawn* with Jesus in the temple, listening to his early teaching; *sunrise* with Jesus, as, pointing to the east, He says, I am the light of the world.

Let us follow, however, another division, which will, perhaps, bring out the truths of the passage more fully, in connection both with man and the Lord; (1.) man at home, Jesus not at home; (2.) man the listener, Jesus the teacher; (3.) man the sinner, Jesus the forgiver; (4.) man the child of darkness, Jesus the light of life.

I. *Man at home, Jesus not at home.* "Every man went to his own house; Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." The crowd which had surrounded Him all the day gradually drops off, one by one, as the evening draws on, and Jesus is left alone. Each one has a home to go to, a roof to shelter him, and retires to rest with his family; Jesus has nowhere to lay his head; they go one way, He goes

another ; they keep within the city walls, He goes without the gate to Olivet, there to spend the night in prayer. He is not at home ; even in the temple, which is his Father's house, He must not stay ; its gates are closing, and He is shut out ; the temple shuts Him out, the city shuts Him out. He can only go to the places where man is not ; to the solitudes where, outside of Jerusalem, outside even of Bethany, He can meet with God. This homelessness of the Son of God was for us. He became homeless that we might have a home,—a home in his Father's house. He went without the gate that we might enter in. He became an exile, taking our place and life of banishment, that we might have an entrance ministered to us into the celestial city, the Paradise of God. Hast thou, O man, availed thyself of this great work, and returned to thy Father's house ? Or art thou still an exile from God, though at home on earth ?

II. *Man the listener, Jesus the teacher.* That to which God calleth us is "listening." "Hear, and your soul shall live ;" "faith cometh by hearing." Christ came to us as the Word,—to *speak* to us ; his very coming was God saying to us, "Now listen to me." Seldom do we find man in this attitude, and hence so little faith ; and, when Christ comes the second time, He will find little faith, because few listening. But here we have a group of listeners, and that in the early dawn, gathered round the eternal Word. And He teaches ! How willing to teach ! How glad to get a listener, an open ear ! How eager is He to pour in all his wisdom ; to teach the ignorant ; to *unteach* them the evil and error ; to teach them

the good and the true ! Are our ears ever open ? Are we eager listeners ? As ready to hear as He is to speak ? Oh how much we lose of happy wisdom, simply from not listening ! Jesus Himself knew what it was to hear the Father, "He wakeneth morning by morning ; He wakeneth mine ear to hear as one who is taught." And having thus learned, He comes to teach. Learn of me, He says. The Lord make us willing learners ! The Lord give us open ears !

III. *Man the sinner, Christ the forgiver.* In the midst of the teaching and the listening a scene occurs ; an interruption, yet not truly so ; an interruption which only illustrates the character of the teacher. Vile sin has just been discovered, and the culprit is brought in. It is flagrant transgression. How will He deal with it ? Will He palliate it, or will He say, Go and stone her. If He does the former, what becomes of his holiness and professed veneration for the law ? If the latter, what becomes of his kindness to publicans and sinners. He does neither. And yet He pardons the guilty ! How marvellous the grace ! How wonderfully He deals with sin and the sinner ! He condemns,—nay, He makes his hearers condemn it,—and not only the woman's, but their own ; yet He forgives ! He shews them sin in a worse, a wider, a more universal aspect than they dreamed of ; yet He also shews that nothing can obstruct his forgiving love. His is pardon to the uttermost. He came to save sinners ! Who is there that He is not willing and able to save ?

IV. *Man the child of darkness, Christ the light of the world.* These are awful words, "children of night,"

children of darkness,—worse even than the world's phrase, children of the mist. The world is dark,—darkness itself. Each soul is dark. Man's efforts to enlighten himself has only left him darker. But the light has come; the true light now shineth. The Christ has come, and He is the light of the world, the light of the soul, the light of life. In the present case He is pointing to the rising sun and saying, "I (not yon sun) am the light of the world." Till I appear all is night. Then, all is day. Christ as the revealer of the Father, of his grace and righteousness,—Christ as the possessor and dispenser of the Holy Ghost,—is the light of the world.

1. Light cheers and gladdens. Thus Jesus gives joy and peace.

2. Light purifies. Jesus renews, sanctifies, assimilates.

3. Light quickens. Jesus removes death; imparts life.

4. Light heals. Jesus heals wounds, diseases; He cures.

5. Light liberates. Jesus sets us free. No bondage where Jesus is.

Oh the difference between night and noon, darkness and sunshine! Have you made the exchange? Will you make it now? He that believeth in me shall not abide in darkness.

LXVIII.

TRUTH AND LIBERTY.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”—JOHN VIII. 31, 32.

“**F**AITH cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”; accordingly we read in verse thirtieth, “As he spake these words many believed on him.” So He taught, and so they believed; as the apostle puts it “So we preached, and so ye believed.” It is always in connection with the word of truth that the Holy Spirit works in us. Christ’s voice and the Spirit’s hand go together. We find this in our text; but we find more than this.

I. *The reception of Christ’s word begins discipleship.* There may be many an anxious thought before this; many a tear; many a bitter groan. There may be alarm, and disquietude, and inquiry. But these are not discipleship. They are but as so many gropings after teaching; so many inquiries after a school and a teacher which will meet the soul’s capacities and longings. All the world is, in its poor, dark way, stretching out its hands after something which can only be realised in Christ. But this is not discipleship. All men are saying, Who will shew us any good; but this is not discipleship. *That* begins with *receiving His word*; not with doing some

great thing ; but with receiving His word ; receiving it as the scholar receives the master's teaching. He *is* the Word ; and He *speaks* the word. What is this word which He speaks ? It is a word (1.) concerning the Father ; (2.) concerning Himself. He comes as the revealer of the Father, and as the declarer of Himself and His work. From the moment that we receive what He tells us concerning the Father and Himself, we become His disciples, His scholars. Thus we are taught, not of man, but of God. This is the true, the authentic beginning of discipleship.

II. *Continuance in that word is the test of true discipleship.* Our Lord evidently lays great stress on this point, *continuance in His word*. It is not continuance in general adherence to His cause, but continuance in His *word*,—in that word, by the reception of which we became disciples. As it is by holding the *beginning* of our confidence that we are made partakers of Christ, so it is by continuing in the word, that we make good the genuineness of our discipleship. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” says Paul ; and it is this word that contains everything we need.

1. It is an *expansive* word ; ever widening its dimensions ; growing upon us ; never old, ever new ; in which we make continual discoveries ; the same tree, but ever putting forth new branches and leaves ; the same river, but ever swelling and widening ; losing none of its old water, yet ever receiving accessions.

(2.) It is a *quickening* word ; maintaining old life, yet producing new ; “Thy word hath quickened me.”

(3.) It is a *strengthening* word ; nerving us and invigorating us ; lifting us up when bowed down ; imparting health, and courage, and resolution, and persistency.

(4.) It is a *sanctifying* word. It purifies ; it detects the evil, and purges it away ; it pours in holiness into the soul. It works a blessed work within. Let us *continue* in it ; not weary of it ; not losing relish for it ; but abiding in it.

III. *Knowledge of the truth is the result of discipleship.* We have seen the properties and virtues of the word in itself ; mark the impartation of these to the disciple. All that enter this school, and that put themselves under the teaching of this instructor, are taught of God ; as it is written, "They shall be all taught of God." He shall know the truth ; not a truth, nor part of it, but *the* truth, the whole of it,—the truth, and not error,—Him who is the truth. He shall be *wise*; wise in Christ; in Him who is our wisdom. He shall *know* it ; not guess at it, nor speculate on it ; nor get a glimpse of it ; but *know* it ; realise it ; make choice of it ; appreciate it. The truth is Christ himself ; the teacher of the truth is Christ ; He is both teacher and lesson. The knowledge of Christ is the knowledge of the truth ; ever growing, both in extent and in depth. Christ's promise to the disciple is, "Thou shalt know the truth." Blessed promise in a day of doubt and error.

IV. *This truth is liberty.* All truth is, so far, liberty, and all error bondage ; some truth is greater liberty, and some error greater bondage. Blessed are these words of the Master : "The truth shall make you free." Bondage, with many, is simply associated with tyranny, bad govern-

ment,—civil or ecclesiastical despotism. Christ's words go far deeper. They go to the root of the evil. The real chains, the real prison, the real bondage, are within, not without; so the true liberty is within, not without. It springs from what a man knows of God and of his Christ. Seldom do men realise this. Error, bondage! How can that be, they say, if the error be the man's own voluntary doing; if it be the result of his own intellectual effort; if it be not connected with prison-walls or the oppression of power? But the master is very explicit. *THE TRUTH* shall make you free! There is no other freedom, worthy of the name, of which this is not the root. "He is the freeman whom the truth makes free; and all are slaves besides."

Be free, says the Son of God to the sons of men! How? By becoming my disciples; knowing the truth which I shall teach; and following me. If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed!

LXIX.

THE FATHER HONOURING THE SON.

"It is my Father that honoureth me."—JOHN VIII. 54.

TO honour is to do or to speak that of a person which shall not only shew him our own esteem for him, but shall let others see that, and make them esteem him likewise. Thus God honoured Abel by openly accepting his sacrifice, and shewing him to be the man of his love and favour. Thus He honoured Enoch by translating him; Noah, by singling him out to be the saved one of his generation; Abraham, by appearing to him as the God of glory, and calling him out of Ur of the Chaldees; Joseph, by bringing him out of the pit of Dothan and the prison of Pharaoh to the second rank in Egypt; Moses, by drawing him out of the Nile, and making him king in Jeshurun; David, by calling him from the sheepfolds of Bethlehem to the throne of Israel; Solomon, by giving him wisdom, and power, and riches, and a peaceful kingdom, and making him so pre-eminently the type of Messiah and his glorious kingdom.

Such is honour, and such is the way in which we see it conferred. By what God said and did to these individuals, He not only manifested his sovereign choice, but his love for them, his appreciation of their character, his sense of their fitness for the honour conferred.

All this is specially seen in the Father's dealings with

his Son. We see his love and admiration for him, as well as his desire to make him the loved and admired of others. We see his delight in him, and his purpose to make him the delight of all in earth and heaven. We see his sense of his infinite excellency, and beauty, and perfection ; his fitness for, and worthiness of the honour bestowed already on him since the day that he ascended on high, and to be yet more abundantly conferred on him at his second coming, when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and admired of all them that believe.

Let us consider,—

I. *The bestower of the honour.* It is the Father. The value of the honour depends greatly on him who bestows it. Honour bestowed for a price, or by self, or by unworthy hands, or by one incapable of judging, is worthless. Flatterers have honoured kings, as Tertullus did Felix, but that was no honour at all. Napoleon put the crown upon his own head, but that was no honour. The Father, however, knows what He is bestowing, and on whom He is conferring the gift. He is fit judge both of the person and the honour. We may then be well assured that the honour received by Christ is well bestowed. The Father loveth the Son ; and this assures us that He is worthy of the love ; He honoureth the Son, and this assures us that He is worthy of the honour.

II. *The receiver of the honour.* It is the Son, the Christ. He it is whom the king delighteth to honour. He is one whom the Father knows well ; and has been acquainted with from all eternity. He is God, very God. He is man, very man. He is God-man, the person in

whom the two natures meet, and therefore altogether peculiar, a new thing on earth, and a new thing in heaven; one in whom all created and all uncreated perfection meets; one in whom all that is glorious in the universe centres; one in whom all that is excellent, both in heaven and earth, is displayed. He is the most marvellous revelation and incarnation of divine wisdom that can be found throughout the universe. He is the infinitely perfect handiwork of the infinitely perfect Jehovah; the only thing brought forth in time and into whose composition creaturehood enters, in which there can be found no flaw, and of which we can say there is not the possibility of fall or failure in all the eternal future.

III. *The nature of the honour bestowed.* As in the constitution of his person we have something peculiar, so in the honour bestowed we have something corresponding to this. It is *divine* honour; but it is more. It is not only all the honour which the Father receives and which the Spirit receives, but it is something in addition, something which they cannot receive, something arising out of the superadded humanity; and humanity in connection with divinity. What this is we may not understand, but we know that it must be so. Again, it is *human* honour, honour in connection with his perfect manhood; for He is the only true specimen of perfect manhood, and as such is entitled to all the honour which God intended for our race. Nay more, He is entitled to honour such as Adam could not receive,—the honour arising to his manhood from its connection with the Godhead; honour, therefore, of a far higher kind than could possibly be

given to any creature not connected with Godhead, yet, still human honour. Thus the Godhead gets an honour such as it could not have got save in virtue of its connection with creaturehood; and the creaturehood gets an honour such as it could not have got save by reason of its connection with Godhead. There is in this way a peculiar honour created, and a peculiar vessel prepared for receiving it; honour such as could not have been received by any other being in the universe, save the Christ of God, the Incarnate Son. From this, too, there springs, peculiar honour to the Father from this God-man,—honour at once divine and human; honour such as no one in heaven or earth can give but he. No one can honour the Father as the Christ of God can.

IV. *The times and ways in which this honour is bestowed.* At his birth, baptism, transfiguration, resurrection, ascension, still more at his second coming. Every day the Father honoured Him when here. Dishonoured by man, He was honoured by God. At present, in heaven, He receives glory and honour. Hereafter, in his kingdom, the full honour is to be bestowed. When He comes again, He comes to be glorified. Thus the Father declares his worthiness, and shews his admiration and love of the Son; his purpose to fill heaven and earth with it, to spread it over all time and all eternity.

V. *The results of this.* The bearings of this honour on the whole universe are immeasurable and inconceivable. This honour is at once the pledge and the measure of the blessing which the universe receives, and shall receive for ever. These results are such as the following,—

1. *To the Father.* It is through the honour conferred on the Son that the Father is more fully unveiled and manifested, as well as more abundantly glorified. The honour bestowed on the Son comes back to the Father; for all that the Son receives, and all that He does, is to the glory of God the Father.

2. *To the Holy Spirit.* The Spirit's office is to glorify Christ; it is through Him that the honour comes to the Son. By means of this shall the Spirit be made fully known and glorified; His Godhead declared and illustrated; His wisdom and power displayed.

3. *To the whole Godhead.* The three-one Jehovah is glorified through means of the honour bestowed upon the second Person, the Incarnate Word. Each Person is more fully manifested and more abundantly glorified; and the One Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit receives new and everlasting honour.

4. *To the Church.* Christ's honour is her's; for all that He has is her's. She is made partaker of Christ, joint-heir with Him. The Bridegroom's glory is not for himself alone. His bride shares it with him. She shares His riches, His inheritance, His kingdom, and His crown. This she does by faith even now; she will do so in reality when He returns as King of kings, to place her beside himself upon His throne.

5. *To heaven.* The greatness of the King's honour adds to the glory of his palace, his metropolis, lighting up the great bridal-hall with new splendour, and irradiating with new brightness, the heavenly Jerusalem, whose brightness is already beyond that of the sun. Infinite is

the addition of glory to the heaven of heavens, from the glory of Him who is its King.

6. *To angels.* He is their head, as well as the church's, —though not so closely knit to them as to us. Principalities and powers are his hosts, his servants, his royal retinue, and in his honour they are honoured. Each angel shines more brightly from the glory put upon the Incarnate Son.

7. *To earth.* At present we do not see any change. The curse is still here. Creation still groans. Shame is over all. But the curse is to pass away. Creation is to be delivered. Earth is to be clothed upon with a new and immortal robe; made more fair than Paradise. All this through the honour put upon the Son. For earth is specially His country, His home,—the birthplace of the Man Christ Jesus. His body is composed of the dust; and here he found not only his cradle, but his grave. Above all other places, it has a claim to share his glory.

8. *To the universe.* The whole wide stretch of infinite space shall be irradiated with this glory. Every planet, every star, every fragment of creation, far and near, shall receive fresh lustre from this new-lighted sun.

Let us honour Him *now*. He will be honoured hereafter. We are sure of that. Such is the Father's purpose. But let us honour Him *now*, when He is getting no honour from men. Let us honour Him here where he gets only dishonour. In the great day for which we are waiting, the day of His second coming, he will be abundantly glorified. But let us who know him not wait for this, but glorify him in this day and age of evil and unbelief.

Sinner, honour Christ ! Honour him by coming to him and getting salvation at his hands. The honour which the Father puts on Him as Saviour, is the security for a present pardon to you. Your pardon is Christ's honour. God glorifies Him in receiving and blessing *you*. Kiss the Son !

LXX.

THE HONOUR GIVEN TO FAITH.

“Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?”—JOHN XI. 40.

THAT which alone is worth the seeing ; that which fills and gladdens the soul, when seen and known ; that, without which we must remain unsatisfied and unblest for ever ; that, in comparison with which all other sights are as nothing,—is “the glory of God.”

That which righteous men of old desired to see, but saw only in glimpses and at intervals ; that, for the seeing of which Moses prayed, saying, “Shew me, I beseech thee, thy glory” ; that to which the eye of every creature should turn, in longing earnestness,—is “the glory of God.”

That which every thing in heaven and earth is intended to reveal, for the “heavens declare the glory of God,” and the earth everywhere shews it forth ; that, for the beholding of which our eyes were made, and for the appreciation of which our minds were formed ; that, for the unfolding of which sin came in, and is yet to be expelled by holiness, and death came in that it may yet be succeeded by more blessed life ; that, for the revelation of which the Son of God took flesh, and died, and was buried, and rose again,—was “the glory of God.”

It is not God Himself that Christ here speaks of our

seeing, though in another place He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is his "glory," or the revelation of that which is in Him,—some visible display of the invisible excellencies that are in Him. In one sense we "shall see God"; in another, we cannot see Him; for no man hath seen nor can see Him; only the Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, can see and declare Him. But without noticing this point farther, we observe that it is His "glory" that is spoken of here as that which we are to see.

The glory of God is that which shews Him to be the glorious being that He is; and it is through the knowledge of His glory that we reach the knowledge of Himself. This glory is spread out before us in all His works; it is written out at length for us to read in the Scriptures of His truth; and it is centred and embodied in his incarnate Son, who is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.

But the one special point of which our Lord here speaks, is His glory as the bringer of life out of death. It was this that the Son of God came so fully to reveal, and did reveal, both in His own person, as the dying and rising One, and in the works of his hands. Elsewhere He speaks of this glory being manifested in his opening the eyes of the blind, and so bringing light out of darkness; here He speaks of shewing it in the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and so bringing life out of death and the grave.

That this was a signal display of divine glory is evident from the greatness of the thing itself, and from the stress

which the Bible lays on resurrection and the power needful to accomplish it. To remove the penalty of death; to undo the work which death had done; to conquer him that had the power of death; to swallow up death in victory;—these are things in the accomplishment of which man could have no share. They are altogether the doing of God; and their accomplishment is the special manifestation of his glory.

Resurrection, then, is that which Christ has taught us to regard as one of the most signal revelations of the glory of God. How it is so, I do not now ask; I take the statement of Scripture as to the fact itself. And if in the resurrection of *one* that glory was to be so conspicuously seen, how much more so in the resurrection of the millions of the saints in the day of the Lord. The glory that God is to get from the resurrection of his saints, is, next to that from the resurrection of his Son, the greatest that He shall receive. Whatever we may have seen or known of this glory before that, will be as nothing when compared with the abundance and the brightness of the glory to be manifested then. One Lazarus raised from the dead was to shew His glory, what will not myriads do?

That which had blotted the work of God, which had marred that which God pronounced good, which had seemed to bring discredit upon God, and to call in question his power, his wisdom, his foresight, his goodness, was *death*. It seemed to have come in in spite of God, and to possess the power of undoing all that God had done; it seemed to intimate the existence of a being stronger than God, and capable of throwing down all that

God might build up ; it seemed to track the footsteps of the Creator, so that wherever He went to create, it followed to destroy. From this what glory could accrue to God ? Did not death seem to mock Omnipotence, and bring his excellency to shame ? It did ; and hence the stress that is laid upon the undoing of death and the emptying of the grave. Hence the glory that is said to be brought to God by resurrection ; and hence the name which Christ takes to himself, "the Resurrection and the Life," and the work which he is specially said to have accomplished, viz., to have brought "life and immortality to light." It is in life, not in death, that the glory of God is seen ; and it is to Him specially as the bringer of life out of death that we are to look, in order to behold his glory.

Let us look more minutely at the words of the Lord before us.

I. *God's purpose to reveal his glory.* To shew Himself is his design in creation ; still more so in his work of resurrection and redemption. Man may hide himself, because he possesses nothing of his own at all ; but God cannot do so ; forth at which is in Him must of necessity come forth, seeing all his fulness is his own, borrowed from none, either in heaven or earth. For his own sake, and for the creature's sake, He must shew himself. Not to do so would be to wrong both Himself and the creature. Were the sun to withdraw its shining, how grievous the loss to us ; yet not halt so terrible as were God to refuse to reveal himself. It is God's purpose to shew himself, to manifest his glory, that thus he may rejoice in the

honour flowing to him from all that He does, and that the creature may be gladdened, and comforted, and blessed in beholding the glory thus presented by God for him to gaze upon.

II. *Christ's desire is that we should see the glory of God.* He is the revealer of the Father, and as such He came to earth. Sin had hidden the Father from our world, as the dark, thick cloud blots out the face of the sun. Christ came to unveil the Father's face, to make known the Father's character, to manifest the Father's glory, to roll off the clouds that covered the face of the Sun. This was his errand; and his desire is to speed in his errand, and to shew us the glory that He came to reveal. Love to the Father makes Him desirous of this, for He desires the Father's glory; love to us makes Him desirous of this, for He seeks our blessedness, and He knows that the creature's blessedness is in beholding the glory of God. O man! What are you without this glory? A world without a flower, or tree, or blade of grass; a sky without a sun or star. Will you not behold it? The Son of God longs to shew it to you. For this end He came into the world, and died and rose again. Will you not turn your eyes to this blessed object, that in beholding it, your soul may be filled with heavenly light and gladness? To say that Christ desires your salvation, and your holiness, and your comfort, is indeed to say much; but to say that He desires your beholding of the glory of God, is to say more than all this; for it is to tell you that He longs to shew you that which, as soon as beheld, would bring life, and gladness, and consolation, and holi-

ness to your soul. When He says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," He means to say, "Come unto me; and I will shew you that which will at once give you rest." When He says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," He means to say, "Let him come unto me, and I will shew him that, the sight of which will be more refreshing to him than all the waters of earth."

III. *It is unbelief that hinders our seeing this glory.* The thing of which the Lord most complained, not only among the people, but among his disciples, was *unbelief*. They were slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken; they put away from them the good news of God's free love in visiting them from on high; and they shut both eyes and ears against the wonders done and spoken by the Son of God in the very midst of them. Had their unbelief shewn itself in putting away from them the evil day, and rejecting the message of judgment, it would not have been so marvellous or unaccountable. But it shewed itself in refusing the tidings of good; in rejecting the grace vouchsafed so abundantly; and in discrediting the signs and wonders displayed so blessedly by Christ before them,—signs and wonders in which God was revealing himself to them, and unfolding the marvels of his glory.

It was this unbelief that obstructed *their* vision of the glory; and it is this same unbelief that does the same evil work still to *us*. Let us see how it does so.

(1.) *It hinders Christ from working those works which shew the glory.* This seems a strange saying, and one which we could not have ventured to utter had it not been

written down for us by inspired men. That a child's hand held up against the sun should hinder it from shining ; that a withered leaf thrown into a stream should stay its flowing or dry up its source ; that the breath of man, breathed up against the sky, should quench the light of its myriad stars ;—these things would not really be so marvellous as that man's unbelief should prevent God's power from being sent forth, and the Son of God from doing those things which would reveal the glory of the Father. Yet we find the strange truth thus recorded. The evangelist Matthew thus writes,—“ He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief ” (xiii. 58) ; and Mark uses still stronger language,—“ He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them ; and he marvelled because of their unbelief ” (vi. 5, 6). The sad and all but incredible truth is thus explicitly declared, that the sinner's unbelief does really hinder Christ from working. His hand is not stayed from working by our unworthiness, or by the multitude of our sins, but simply by our *unbelief*. It was this that arrested Christ's miracles in Galilee ; it was this that (if we may so speak) almost hindered the raising of Lazarus from the dead. It was to this that Christ referred when He said to the father of the demoniac, “ If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth ; ” and it was on the acknowledgment of this that the man so eagerly replied, “ Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief ” (Mark ix. 23, 24). Yes, it is unbelief that lays its arrest on Christ's hand, and says, Work not ; it is unbelief that thrusts away alike the

power and the grace of God ; it is unbelief that says, " Depart out of our coasts."

(2.) *It hinders us from perceiving the glory that is in the works, even when they are wrought.* Christ's hand was not always stayed by man's rejection of his love and power. It did work the works of God before human eyes ; works in which the glory of God did shine most brightly. Men saw the works, but they saw not the glory. They saw the healing of the leper, but they saw not the glory of God revealed in that. They saw the opening of the eyes of the blind, the unstopping of the ears of the deaf, the giving feet to the lame, the casting out of devils ; but they saw not the glory of God in these,—even as they saw not either God Himself, or his glory in Him who did these works. In the case of the feeding of the multitude, they saw the miracle, they partook of the food, yet they did not see God in this at all ; nay, they followed Jesus for a while because of the wondrous supply thus administered by Him, but they perceived nothing glorious or divine in it. " Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled" (John vi. 26).

The glory wrapt up in these miracles could only come forth to faith. To unbelief they appeared common things, or, at the most, only striking facts in which there was little meaning. It was faith that pierced beyond the shell ; it was faith that drew aside the veil ; it was faith that saw God in all of these, and drank of the living waters of his grace, of which each of these miracles was the blessed well.

(3.) *It hinders us enjoying the glory even after we have in some measure seen it.* Christ's disciples saw the glory shewn forth in his miracles; yet, after all, they realised it but little. It seemed to come to them in glimpses and at intervals, not continuously. Like men with a telescope at their side, and sometimes looking through it, and sometimes closing it up; so these disciples entered but little into the glory which they yet acknowledged, and at times enjoyed. Faith was not always in exercise. There was more of unbelief than of faith in their history. They had faith enough to shew them something; but their unbelief hid more than their faith revealed. And it is even more so with us than it was with them. For the full glory has been manifested now in the dying and rising of Him who is the brightness of Jehovah's glory. Our eye rests on it, and at times we can say truly, "We beheld his glory"; yet how faintly does it shine to us! How much oftener is it hidden than revealed! How seldom do we receive from it the joy, and the comfort, and the quickening which it should unceasingly impart! We get but a few rays when we might get the whole sun. We get but these rays at intervals when we might have unbroken sunshine every hour. Ought not Christ's words to rebuke us and to recall us to faith? "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God."

IV. *Christ's reproof of unbelief, and call to faith.* Both of these things are implied in the words, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" He is evidently not giving this reproof for the first time. He is but repeating what He said to

them oftentimes before ; and He is reminding them of his former lessons and exhortations, which they were on the point of forgetting : "Said I not unto thee." The words are simple, and the rebuke is gently spoken ; but not the less on that account is the question fitted to reach the conscience and humble the unbelieving spirit. "Said I not unto thee," *i. e.* "Have I not, not only on this occasion, but often at other times, told you what faith would do for you, and what unbelief is shutting you out from ; and shall I say it all in vain ?"

Yes, it is to faith that the Son of God is here calling us ; it is against unbelief that He is warning us. Unbelief never did aught for a soul, and never will ; faith has done wonders in time past, and will do so in all present time, as well as in all time to come. "Have faith in God" ! "Only believe." Be not faithless, but believing. Trust God for everything, and say, even in the most unlikely circumstances, Is there anything too hard for the Lord ?

The circumstances in which the two sisters of Bethany were placed were trying. What could they hope for ? Had the Lord arrived in time, they might have hoped that He would have healed their brother. But He had, apparently, arrived too late. Lazarus was dead ; and were they to hope for resurrection ? Our Lord did not exactly say this ; but He evidently meant to tell them that, if they would but trust Him, they would find that He would do something for them far beyond what they could ask or think,—that there was nothing which He would not do for them,—no length to which He would

not go in the putting forth of his power to shew them the glory of God. Their position was, after all, not more trying than Abraham's, when called on to offer up his son ; and if he believed and staggered not, if he hoped against hope and was strong in faith, giving glory to God, why should not they ? As children of believing Abraham, to whom the " God of glory " appeared, might not the Lord well address them, " Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God."

In these words of Christ there is a tone of sorrowful complaint, nay, we may say of vexation and disappointment, because of the slow faith of his disciples. It is like that indicated in his words to the disciples, " Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip ? " He expected something else ; and He had reason to do so. He looked for confidence, and He had given them full ground for such confidence. Might He not well be disappointed at the poor result ? What, after all He had said and done, still as hesitating, as suspicious, as distrustful as ever ! Could He have expected this at their hands ?

Let Christ's words shame us out of our unbelief. The rebuke is mild, but all the more fitted to find its way into our hearts. Be ashamed of your hard thoughts of this gracious One, after all that He has done. Be ashamed of your misgivings, your doubtings, your dark distrust. Trust Him wholly and fully. Trust Him according to this infinite trustworthiness. Trust Him in everything. Trust Him now. Trust Him in your days of darkness, as well as in your days of light. Trust him in your

sorrows, as well as your joys. Say not, My case is hopeless ; my wound is uncurable ; I may bear it ; but as to deliverance, or blessing, or glory as the result, that is impossible. Your case is not more hopeless than that of her whom the Lord thus rebuked for her unbelief ; "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God."

Good out of all evil, life out of all death, glory out of all shame, joy out of all sorrow ; this is God's law and purpose for every one who believes in his name. Time may be needed for the unfolding of the issues ; patience may be long and sorely tried ; the results may be long of emerging from beneath the dark surface under which they were pressed down ; but of the end there can be no doubt. Let faith hold fast ; let patience have her perfect work ; and, according to our faith and patience, nay, far beyond them, shall be the recompense. Hannah found it so ; and was made to rejoice in a long-sought son. Naomi found it so ; and her old age was brightened beyond all her hopes or fears. Job found it so ; for, having held fast his confidence, he lived to see his latter end better than his beginning. Yet we forget this gracious law of the kingdom, and ofttimes lose heart, when the trial is long and the shadows hang thickly over us. We take hold, and again we lose hold. We are cheered, and again we despond. How continually we need to be reminded of the sure reward of faith, and to have the Lord's words spoken to us, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God."

LXXI.

INQUIRING AFTER JESUS.

"We would see Jesus."—JOHN XII. 12.

IT was from Gentile lips that these words came. A Jew would perhaps have said, in such circumstances, We would see this Christ ; the Greek, who knows nothing about the Messiah, but hears of a wonder-working Galilean, says, "We would see Jesus," *i.e.* "we *wish* to see Him." Was this a genuine Gentile longing, expressive of the world's desire, for "the Desire of all nations,"—the utterance of a poor human heart that had heard of something likely to fill up its void,—the outgoing of feelings, such as drew the publicans and sinners to hear Him,—the vague cry of humanity, "Who will shew us any good?"—brought at last to a point ?

We know not. We cannot answer these questions, for there is nothing in the narrative to illustrate the words ; to tell who these Greeks were ; in what spirit they put the request ; or what was the answer. The narrative is abrupt and isolated. The words stand alone. "Philip cometh and telleth Andrew : and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus." That is all we know. That Jesus received them, or shewed Himself to them, or spoke directly to them, is not said. Probably the discourse that follows was spoken

in their hearing, though mainly intended for the disciples. They were brought in to the circle of disciples, as listeners to the gracious words which He proceeded to speak concerning Himself,—his life, his death, his resurrection.

There are three kinds of inquirers after Jesus mentioned in the gospels. (1.) *Herod*, who desired more than once to see Him (Luke ix. 9, xxiii. 8). His was curiosity that came to nothing. How many Herods are there ! (2.) *Zaccheus*. He sought to see Jesus who He was. His curiosity came to something. It ended in a visit of Jesus Himself. There are Zaccheuses, too, whose first inquiries are vague, but who are led on by the Spirit to Jesus. (3.) *The Greeks*. These seem to have been farther on than Zaccheus in their inquiries. Theirs was more than curiosity ; it was the earnest longing of men who had got a glimpse of Him. We have Greeks, too, in our day ; men whose souls God has touched, and across whose eyes He has flashed some rays of the glory of his Incarnate Son. Are there any Greeks among us ? Rest not ; keep not aloof ; come near ; learn of Him ; look to Him and be saved. For thus it is that the far-off Gentile is brought nigh ; and the Greek becomes a Son of Abraham. Is there a Herod here ? Beware and tremble. You may be lost. Your curiosity may end in nothing. Be a Zaccheus or a Greek. Jesus was not unwilling to be seen. He was the most accessible of men. Talk of kind, winning, accessible, large-hearted men ! Was there ever one like Him ? He did not hide Himself ; He did not turn from his fellow-men, as if shrinking from their intercourse or disliking to be troubled. He made everybody feel at home

with Him. He laid Himself out for meeting them, and being visited by them. He received sinners, and made them feel that He had come to save them.

Modestly and diffidently these Greeks first approach the disciples, and through them are introduced to the Master. They needed not to have recourse to this circuitous manner of approach. Had they known Him thoroughly, they would sooner have gone to Himself. He would say, "Suffer them to come," even when the disciples rebuked and forbade. And so is it still with us. We trust the disciple more than the Master. We go with confidence to a minister, but we go distrustingly to the Lord. What unbelief, what perversity, what ignorance ! How little have we learned his love !

"We would see Jesus" is the daily utterance of our heart. If we have seen little, we want to see much ; if we have seen much, we want to see more. Shew us Jesus is our cry.

Why do we so desire to see Him ? What does this vision do for us ?

1. *It gives rest.* To see Him as the resting-place is to rest. There are some objects so calm and restful, that the very sight of them is rest. This is one of them ; the chief of them.

2. *It pacifies.* He is our peace ; and to see Him is to have peace. The sight of Him as the propitiation for sin pacifies the conscience.

3. *It quickens.* He is our life ; and the sight of Him as such puts life into us. It is a quickening vision.

4. *It heals.* As the Sun of righteousness, He rises on

us with healing. There is health in looking to this sun of health.

5. *It enlightens.* He is the light of the world ; and to see Him as such is to have day within us. It is an enlightening vision.

6. *It sets free.* He and his truth make us free. Connection with Him is liberty. The vision liberates. It thaws the soul, and melts all our ice.

7. *It strengthens.* All power is in Him ; and the sight of Him draws it out to us. We become strong in looking.

8. *It fills.* In Him is all fulness ; and in looking we are filled. Every void in our souls disappears.

9. *It gladdens.* We are made partakers of his joy. We are satisfied. It is a gladdening and satisfying vision.

LXXII.

THE GREAT ATTRACTION.

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”—JOHN XII. 32.

THIS is Christ's own testimony to the power of his death and resurrection. Both of these are included. The Christ of God is lifted up to the cross, and there is power in that; the Christ of God is lifted out of the grave (*ἐκ τῆς γῆς*), and there is power in that.

Mark the *kind* of power. It is not destructive, or repulsive, or punitive; it is *attractive*. It *draws*. It is not compulsive or harsh, but simply attractive. The sun draws up the vapours from the sea, and then hangs a brilliant rainbow on them; so Christ draws up the sons of men from the depths of our low world, and glorifies them. His attraction is like that of the sun. His attraction is magnetic, too; it is the attraction of the magnet to the pole. As the far-distant north pole, by an unseen influence, lays hold on the motionless iron and turns it to itself, so does the far-off Golgotha, our truer, better pole, draw the sons of men, and cluster them round itself. Have you felt the magnetic virtue of the cross and grave of Christ? Have they acted upon you?

It is not simply the Christ that is the magnet; it is the crucified Christ. It is crucifixion that has imparted to Him his attractive power; just as it is death that has

given Him his life-giving power. It is not Christ without the cross; nor is it the cross without Christ; it is both of them together.

But mark the greatness of the power. It is sufficient to draw all men. It has *not* drawn all men. There are millions in hell who shall never be drawn. There are millions upon earth who are not yet drawn. Yet there is virtue in the crucified one to draw every one. It is almighty influence; irresistible power; power which no human heart could have resisted, had it so pleased the Father to put it forth. A power that could draw the myriads of stars and planets, and cluster them round itself, must be great; but a power that can draw millions of human hearts must be greater far.

But wherein consists its magnetic power? Apart from its being the centre from which omnipotence goes forth; the place in which, and the way by which, righteous power is savingly put forth for the arrestment of the sinner, it contains everything that the sinner needs. It is suitable,—

I. *Because of the love which it embodies.* Herein is love! The love that passeth knowledge! The love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ crucified, dead, buried, risen, is the great revelation of the grace of God. What so magnetic as love?

II. *Because of the righteousness which it exhibits.* This “great sight” is one of infinite righteousness. It is the cross of righteousness; the resurrection of righteousness. It is for the unrighteous, and yet it is righteous. It is righteousness combining with love and taking the sinner’s

side against law and judgment and the eternal penalty. How attractive is righteousness like this !

III. *Because of the truth which it proclaims.* All God's revealed truth is connected with the cross. Divine wisdom is concentrated there. In Jesus, the crucified, there is the wisdom of God, and He is made unto us wisdom. In the cross we have the refutation of man's errors and Satan's lies ; the great embodiment of heavenly and everlasting truth. Here all truth and all wisdom are centred ! How can it but be magnetic !

IV. *Because of the reconciliation which it publishes.* It proposes peace to the sinner ; for it has made peace. Jesus has made peace by the blood of his cross. Peace to him that is afar off and to him that is nigh ! Here is the meeting-place between man and God. Here we stand and say, "Be reconciled."

V. *Because of the healing which it brings.* There is healing in its shadow. He who touches is healed,—healed in every part. The healing begins now in the soul ; it is completed hereafter in the resurrection of the body. Jesus, the dead and risen One is our healer ! In this healing we include not simple relief from pain, or weariness, or spiritual infirmity, but deliverance from *sin*. The cross purifies. The fulness of the crucified One is the fountain of our holiness.

Thus the cross,—the gospel,—the crucified One,—all these make up the "power of God" ; the power which attracts, quickens, saves, purifies ! It draws,—draws irresistibly ; for in it is the strength of omnipotence.

LXXIII.

LIGHT AND ITS LITTLE WHILE.

“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you: walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.”—
JOHN XII. 35, 36.

THE speaker here was one who knew what light was, what it could do, where it was to be found, and how terrible it must be to be without it. He had come from the land of light, where there was no darkness, and where all were walking in the light. In that home of light there were angels of light and spirits of light. All sons of light! He speaks, therefore, with authority, and we know that his words are true.

I. *The light.* Light is that which shews or reveals all objects, as darkness is that which hides. Our earthly sun daily reveals to us man and the things of man; the heavenly sun reveals to us God and the things of God. Christ is Himself that light. He is both the light and the sun. As the life, He is the light. The life is the light of man. He is the light of the world; the true light; beside which all other lights are false and unreal. That which shines from his face, from his works, from his words, from his cross, is *light*. “We look to Him and are lightened.” He reveals the Father; the Father’s love, the Father’s

righteousness, the Father's character ; all the riches of his grace ; and we, opening our eyes to take in this light, are thereby enlightened. That which shines into us is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Light for a dark world ! Light for a dark soul ! This is our message.

II. *The light with us.* The first gleam of it came in the first promise. After that the rays multiplied. But still "the light" had not come. But when "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," then it came. It remained here in human form for thirty-three years. It is still, though impersonally, "with us" ; and it will yet be more gloriously with us when He comes again. After Jesus had spoken of the light being with them, he withdrew Himself,—to shew that his presence was the light, and to shew the difference between light and darkness, his presence and his absence. Yes ; the light is with us still. In a sense it is withdrawn, yet still with us ; still in our world ; still shining in its brightness out of the testimony concerning "the light" left us in the gospels. There the true light still shineth. We may withdraw from it, but it never withdraws from us. We may shut our eyes and our windows, but the light still shineth. God is light, God is love, is still the burden of that testimony. The light is not far off nor clouded, but nigh and clear ; not starlight nor moonlight, but sunlight,—pure, bright, and gladdening. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. O dark world, when wilt thou let in the light ! O dark soul, O child of darkness, when wilt thou be enlightened !

III. *The little while of light.* The special little while referred to here was that of our Lord's presence on earth,—a blessed little while indeed ! He so near, so gracious, so willing to bless ! But there are other little whiles. Jerusalem had her little while. Israel had her little while. The churches have all had or are having their little while. The nations have had or are having their little while. Each congregation has its little while. Each soul has its little while. A little while of the gospel, a little while of invitations from God, a little while of Sabbaths, and sermons, and sacraments, and providences,—and all is done. The light departs. O man what has the light done for thee ? How hast thou been dealing with it ? Hast thou let it in or shut it out ? Thy little while of light may soon be at an end. The night cometh ! The eternal darkness is at hand ! Jesus is coming ; but not with light ; only with darkness to the despisers of the light.

IV. *The using of the light.* Walking is here a general expression for the whole of a man's life, in all its actings, and changes, and movements. Our Lord's meaning is, "Use this light for whatever you do, so long as you have it : do everything in your daily life, in this light." Use this light then, is the Lord's message to us. The process of using it is then described.

(I.) *Believe in the light.* Receive the Father's testimony to this light, to its genuineness, its excellency, its divinity, its suitableness, its varied qualities and fitnesses to meet the wants of a child of darkness. Believe in this light, and believe in no other. The light of reason, intellect, literature, science, will do nothing for your soul. At best

it is but starlight, "distinct but distant ; clear, but oh how cold" ; still oftener is it the meteor, or the lightning, or the volcano, or the taper, or the spark of your own kindling. Believe in this heavenly and divine light. It will suffice. There is no darkness too dense for it either within you or without. There is light for the darkness. God proclaims his testimony concerning this true light. Receive that testimony, and, on receiving it, receive the light. It wants admission into you ! Oh admit it !

(2.) *Become children of the light.* He into whom the light enters becomes a child of light. The light rests on him ; surrounds him ; abides with him ; dwells in him ; pervades him. It guides him ; heals him ; comforts and cheers him ; purifies him ; assimilates him to himself. He becomes in all senses a child of light and of the day. He becomes, also, a light to others,—a light to the world. And walking in the light, he is not only filled with holy gladness, but he *shines* ; his light shines ; the dark world is the better for his being in it. He shines in his daily walk and public life. He is in his own way a measure what "the light" was when here,—a "light of the world."

V. *The refusal to use the light.* This may be called neglect, or delay, or hatred, or rejection,—still it is refusal to make use of the light. It is preference of the darkness to the light ; it is preference of the *works* of darkness to the *works* of light. It is something *positive* and *wilful*, whatever men may say. No man remains in darkness for lack of light, but because of his own shutting out the light. This refusal to make use of the light leads to stumbling,

to straying, to complete mistaking of the way, and losing the destination. It leads to this *now*; it ends in this more terribly. For the withdrawal of the light is at hand. The darkness comes,—the deep, the eternal darkness, in which men, who have rejected the light, shall stumble and wander for ever. O these eternal stumblings! These everlasting wanderings! O these dark mountains, on which the sinner's feet shall stumble! O that gross darkness, that palpable darkness, that blackness of darkness, which is to be the sinner's portion and dwelling-place for ever! Night without morning! Everlasting midnight!

The true light now shineth! This is our message. All the love of God is in it. All the joy of heaven is in it. All the glory of the kingdom is in it. It shineth now; it may soon pass away! Oh use it sinner, use it. Allow it to enter; and, in entering, to transform that dark dungeon of your soul into a very heaven of light.

LXXIV.

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD'S DARKNESS.

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."—JOHN XII. 46.

IT is Christ who is the speaker. He speaks of two things : of Himself, and of our world. Let us hear what He has to tell us concerning both.

I. *Our world is dark.* God did not make it so at first. He said, Let there be light. But man has darkened it; Satan has darkened it; sin has darkened it. Every soul in it is darkness. Night is in all, and *over* all.

(1.) *It is the darkness of sleep.* The sleeper sees not the light. He may dream that he sees it, but that is all. His eyes are closed.

(2.) *It is the darkness of death.* Life has left the limbs and organs; and with life all light has fled. Darkness reigns.

(3.) *It is the darkness of the tomb.* This is the very death of death. Buried beneath the earth, the darkness is doubled.

(4.) *It is the darkness of Satan.* He is the ruler of the darkness of this world; and of this darkness we are partakers.

(5.) *It is the darkness of hell.* Our world is an earnest of the blackness of darkness for ever. Little as men

believe it, it is the shadow of hell that covers our earth, and it is a part of hell itself that fills the sinner's soul.

Such is our world's darkness. Such is the condition of each sinner's soul. How sad, how terrible !

II. *There is light for it.* Deep as the darkness is, it is not hopeless. There is enough of light in God and in heaven yet. Light has not been quenched throughout the universe though driven from our world. Darkness is wide, but it is not universal. The report has come to us of light. And this is good news. There is light.

III. *This light has come.* It is not afar off ; but nigh. Not in heaven merely ; it has come down to earth. Oh, what an arrival ! The richest freight that ever reached our shores ! The gospel announces not light merely, but its arrival. It has come ! He himself has said, "I am come."

IV. *Christ is the light.* He is the brightness of Jehovah's glory ; the true light ; the sun of righteousness ; the day-star ; the bright and morning-star. All the light of Godhead is centred in him. All the light of heaven ; all the light of the universe is gathered into him. He has come to be the light of the world. He is the alpha and omega of the Bible, which is the one book of light. He is the light of the world in three ways :

(I.) *Because of what he shews us of the Father.* He is the revealer of the Father, and of the Father's love and holiness ; as such, He is the dispeller of the clouds that have long rested over earth, hiding the face of God. The glory of Godhead is embodied in Him, and shines forth from Him to us ; and He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.

(2.) *Because of what He does to us.* He pardons, heals, comforts, blesses, saves. As the Saviour, He is our light. As the Christ of God, He is our light. As Prophet, Priest, and King He is our light.

(3.) *Because of what He is yet to do for our world.* When He comes again He shall be fully known as the world's light. Then shall be earth's true morning and noon ; till then it is but twilight. His throne shall be the throne of light ; his reign shall be the reign of light. All earth shall rejoice in his light.

V. *The way in which the light enters.* It is in believing. Not in working or waiting, but in believing. Faith ends the darkness, and lets in the glorious light. Believe in Jesus and all is light. The day breaks and the shadows flee away.

VI. *The freeness and universality of the light.* That word "whosoever" is enough to make every sinner feel that the light is for him ; that he has liberty to use the light ; that he has a right to the light ; and his right is that he needs it. The darkness needs the light ; so the sinner needs Christ. Nay, and Christ needs the sinner ! For the light needs the darkness, else would its glory be wasted.

Oh, what a glorious gospel do these words of Jesus preach to us. "I am come a light into the world."

LXXV.

THE JUDGING WORD.

“The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”—JOHN XII. 48.

1. *T*HERE is a last day. This world shall not always roll on. There shall be a stoppage, a break. God shall interpose at length. He shall speak and not be silent. He shall make bare his arm. It is God's day that is coming. “He hath appointed a day.” Not “the last” in one sense; for there shall be no last day either to righteous or wicked. But in reference to the existing state, and order, and run of things and events, there is a last day, a winding up, a reckoning. The world's great river shall at last reach the sea. “To-morrow” shall then cease, and that word of mystery, and procrastination, and suspense be known no more.

2. *That day shall be one of judgment.* The long unsettled cases of earth shall be settled then. Time's riddles shall all be solved. Time's mysteries shall all be cleared up. Time's wrongs shall all be righted. The oppressed shall be vindicated; the triumphing of the wicked shall cease; the evil-doer shall be put to shame. No more error, or unbelief, or falsehood, or wrong judgment upon men and things. No calling good evil, and evil good; no putting light for darkness, or darkness for light. No shams, no shadows, no mockeries, no dis-

honesties, no hypocrisies. All shall be transparency, light, truth, righteousness. The judgment shall be just ; undoing the evil ; establishing and perfecting the good ; no partiality ; no respect of persons ; no fear of man ; no bribery nor corrupt influence ; no hesitations nor imperfect decisions. The Judge is righteous, and his sentences will be righteous like Himself.

3. *Christ's word shall judge us.* Not that this word is to supersede *the Judge*, but it will form the test, the ground of judgment. We can imagine, in connection with that word, such questions as these arising.

(1.) Did that word reach you ? Were you within the circle to which that word came ? Did it fall on your ears ?

(2.) Did you listen to it ? Did you open both ear and heart to it ? Or, did you spend your lives in listening to something else,—other words, other persons ?

(3.) Did you treat it as a *true* word ? It is true, infinitely *true*, altogether true ; did you treat it as such ? Or, was the treatment you gave it that of one who saw no truth in it ? Did you profess to receive it as *true*, and yet treat it as *untrue* ?

(4.) Did you treat it as *accurate* ? It is thoroughly so. There is no flaw, no mistake, no imperfection in it. Did you treat it as such, or did you try to find fault with it to prove it to be incorrect and imperfect, perhaps contradictory ? Did you cavil at it as not quite satisfactory or sufficient, in order to get quit of the tremendous pressure of responsibility on the conscience arising out of a perfect word.

(5.) Did you treat it as *divine*? It is divine; for He who spoke it is the Son of God. His word is not merely perfect and superhuman, but divine; divine in its origin, in its substance, in its form,—directly (not indirectly like the works of creation) divine. Did you treat it as such? Did you reverence it, submit to it, implicitly receive it? If not, then you are verily guilty,—just as if you refused to worship God. He that does not treat Christ's words as divine, is in the same sense guilty of blasphemy, as he who denies His person to be divine. Men are to honour Him and His words, even as they honour the Father and His words.

(6.) Did you accept it as *suitable* to yourself? It does concern you, very closely and powerfully. It bears on you just now in time; still more so hereafter in eternity. He meant it for you. He spoke it for you. He directed it so as to suit you, and to reach you. It meets your case. It contains what you need,—peace with God and life eternal. Did you accept it as such? Did you receive it not only as a faithful saying, but as worthy of all acceptance? Or did you pass it by as unneeded and unsuitable? Did you treat it with indifference as if you were not concerned in it? Did you *reject* it? Did you say, I needed it not, and so I flung it from me?

By this word, then, let us judge ourselves just now, that so we may not be condemned by it in the great day. It is a living word; quick and powerful, like Him who spoke it. Let us apply it. What has it done for us? Has it brought us nigh to God? Has it set us in the position of pardoned men? Has it poured in peace and light? Has

it done, and is it doing for us, such things as these? It was meant to do so. Is it doing so?

If not hitherto, shall it not do so now? Remember, it is a judging, testing, discerning word with which you have to do. It is sharper than a two-edged sword. It will not allow itself to be trifled with. It carries its own judgment, its own vengeance within it. It demands immediate reception; and it promises, *upon that reception*, immediate forgiveness, and an everlasting salvation. He that receives the word of the Amen, the true and faithful witness, shall be saved. There is no "if," no "perhaps," no doubting about it. It is a present certainty; and a certainty as absolute as it is present. In that word is life, peace, pardon, reconciliation; and the moment that faith touches that word, all these flow out into the soul. Yes; he that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

LXXVI.

THE REVELATION OF THE FATHER.

“Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.”—JOHN XIV. 8-10.

FREQUENTLY did Jesus speak to His disciples of the Father. Sometimes “my Father,” sometimes “your Father,” sometimes “the Father.” They knew whom He meant, Jehovah, Israel’s God. But when He spoke of their knowing the Father, and of having seen Him; of His going to the Father, and preparing a place for them in the Father’s house, and taking them to be there with them, they seemed bewildered, some asking one question, and some another, in their ignorance and perplexity. His words had roused their interest, but not satisfied it. He had pointed them to an object and a Being of whom they felt they knew but little. What is this place, and where is this way, and who is this Being of whom He speaks? Eye and ear are turned in the direction to which He is pointing.

I. *The request.* “Show us the Father, and it sufficeth.” Philip spoke for his brethren as well as for himself. He speaks for us also.

(1.) *It is a proper request.* It is not curiosity nor foolishness that dictate it. It is one naturally and obviously suggested by the words of Christ; one which he meant to be suggested, and which He meant to comply with. Just the request for a creature, for a sinner.

(2.) *It is an intelligent request.* Philip knew what he was asking, though there was much ignorance about His question. It is not vague, like those who cry blindly, Who will shew us any good? It bears on a definite object. It fixes on a certain desirable point, which it would fain have cleared up. It knows what it wants.

(3.) *It is an earnest request.* He who utters it is not using mere words of course. He is thoroughly in earnest. Christ's words have roused him into earnestness. He feels as if he ought to know and *must* know the Father. Other requests may take a denial, this will not. It is a life and death request; "For this is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

(4.) *It is a noble request.* There is something elevated about it; nothing low or paltry. It was worthy of Him to whom it was addressed, and about whom it was made.

(5.) *It is a satisfying request.* "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth." The blessing craved would fill the soul. The knowledge of the Father would be all that was needed. Other sights might fill it in part, this would fill it all, so that it would say, "It is enough."

Have their longings found their way into you? Has this request been the expression of them? Do you know

the Father? And what has the knowledge of the Father done for you? Has it filled you? Has it weaned you from all other knowledge, and made you say, This is enough? Are you recognised among men as those who "know the Father?"

II. *The rebuke.* It is the utterance of surprise and disappointment. The request was not a wrong one; but it need not have been put, had they not been so slow of heart to see and to believe. The reproof is gentle, yet very decided. In it Christ lays his finger on the seat of the evil, and shews how the question betokened an ignorance that ought not to have existed. It is an appeal to themselves, to their past history and converse with Him; to their opportunities of knowing His words, His doings, HIMSELF. Have these years of intercourse been of no avail? Have my words and miracles done nothing? Have you not fathomed me, seen through me, interpreted me? Has all been in vain? "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" After all that has been said and done, is it not strange that you should still put the question? At first it was natural; *now*, after so long a time, it is strange,—all but incredible. How is it that ye have not known me? Have I kept back anything? Have I used obscure words? Has my life been ambiguous? Hast thou not known me? How sayest thou *now*, Shew us the Father?

III. *The answer.* I have shewn you the Father. How and where? In myself. When? All the time I have been with you. I and the Father are one. You could not see me truly without seeing the Father.

Christ, then, is the Revealer of the Father; the exponent of the Father's mind; the interpreter of the Father's character and purpose. The Word was made flesh in order to shew us *God*,—that we might see Him with our eyes, hear Him with our ears, touch Him with our hands, converse with him face to face as a man with his friend. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life; for the Life was manifested" (1 John i. 1, 2). When asked, How shall I realise God? we answer, Realise Christ. How shall we go to God? Go to Christ. Look into His face; kneel before Him, as the leper did; deal with Him, as did the blind and deaf when He was here. He is in the Father, and the Father in Him. His works and words are the works and words of the Father. His love, and grace, and pity are those of the Father. Know Christ, then, and you know the Father.

Let us take from all this the following lessons:

1. *We are slow to learn.* "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." When we might have been teachers, we need to be taught the principles of the oracles of God. Slow to hear, slow to learn, slow to believe;—this is our character.
2. *Jesus is swift to teach.* Strange contrast. We so slow to learn, He so swift and ready to teach. If we are not wise, it is not our teacher's fault. "Learn of me," is his message to us daily.
3. *He teaches us about the Father.* The Father shews

us the Son, and the Son shews us the Father. The invisible is seen in the visible. If we want to know the unseen God, let us go to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, to Calvary. If we are perplexed about Him who is a Spirit, let us go to Him who has a body like ourselves. He will reveal the Father.

LXXVII.

THE ABIDING COMFORTER.

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ; even the Spirit of truth ; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him ; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”
—JOHN XIV. 16, 17.

CHRIST expects us to love Him. He claims our love, and He deserves it all. He has done enough to win it. May He not then most reasonably ask the question, “Lovest thou me?”

Christ expects us to “keep his commandments,” that is to listen to his teachings, and to observe all his “instructions,” for this is the meaning of commandments. This is the necessary result and manifestation of our love. Love and obey ; love and listen ; love and follow ; love and keep my words.

To those who thus love and listen He promises much. What is there that He will withhold from them ? But here, it is of *one* thing only that He speaks,—the Holy Spirit. This Spirit He is to obtain from the Father for those who thus hear *his* voice ; and in this Spirit is contained everything they need for life, and peace, and consolation. O gift of the Holy Ghost, what is there that thou dost not contain for us ! Let us mark the things connected with this gift, of which the Lord here speaks to us.

I. *A Comforter.* The word is a wide one. It means one who comforts, or who pleads, or who exhorts ; one who " calls us to his side," as a father does his child when he has some special thing to say. The Holy Ghost is all this to us. How little we use Him, or trust Him, or lean on Him, or love Him, or deal with Him. And how much we suffer loss by this neglect ! How much do we grieve and vex Him ! We might be so much more full of peace, and light, and love, and holiness, and strength, and comfort, did we but employ this " Comforter " more constantly, more trustfully. Our desponding complaints are all of them indications of our slighting Him ! We will not allow Him to do his work nor to bestow his love.

II. *Another Comforter.* This word " another " is full of meaning, and helps to link the Holy Spirit and Jesus together. His office is not to hide but to shew Jesus ; not to make us forget, but remember Him.

(1.) *Another instead of myself.* I am going, but He is coming. He will fill up my place ; my place of fellowship, counsel, comfort, and love. He will be to you, for consolation, what I have been to you.

(2.) *Another like myself.* He will be another, and yet not another ; one in mind and sympathy with myself towards you. In having Him you have me.

(3.) *Another in addition to myself.* I am still with you, though I go away. And in addition to my presence, you shall have the presence of another like myself, divine. Two Comforters instead of one ; the outward and visible presence gone, but the inward and invisible presence

doubled ; and thus double blessing, double consolation, double strength. Surely the "love of Christ" and "the love of the Spirit" will prove sufficient for our joy, as the power of Christ and the power of the Spirit are enough for our help.

III. *A Comforter the gift of the Father.* At first He was the "promise of the Father," and then He is "the gift of the Father." It is He of whom Jesus speaks (John iv. 10), "If thou knewest the gift of God." He is as truly the *gift* of the Father, and the *sent* of the Father, as is Christ himself. Thus we are doubly linked to the Father. Both of these are "unspeakable gifts"; both are presented to us freely, that we may use them and be blest. "If ye, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father *give* the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." It is the Father's good pleasure that we should receive the Holy Ghost ; that we should be baptised with the Spirit from on high. Then shall we live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and pray in the Spirit, and be filled with the Spirit. We shall be vessels which the Father fills, and keeps for ever full.

IV. *A Comforter the fruit of Christ's intercession.* "I will *pray* the Father, and He will *give*." The word *pray* seems here to refer to Christ's *priestly* dealings, his consultation or communication with the Father, like the High Priest with Urim and Thummim, "I will *pray*, and He will *give*" ! He speaks as our High Priest dealing with God for us. He specially deals with God regarding the gift of the Comforter. He did so when He ascended on high and was glorified. He does so continually still.

There is *always* the praying, and *always* the giving. He has received the Holy Spirit as the Father's gift ; and *with* Him and *in* Him all other gifts ; gifts the expression of the Father's love and of his own. Thus we deal with Him ; and He deals with the Father for us. Him the Father heareth always, nay, to Him the Father says, " Ask of me and I will give thee " (Ps. ii. 8).

V. *A Comforter who shall abide with us for ever.* The words are more exactly " unto the age," that is until the coming age or time of Christ's return, implying the Spirit's special presence during Christ's absence. Not as if He were to leave us on Christ's return. But his special work as Comforter is during his absence. He comes to fill up a blank made by the Lord's departure ; to cheer the afflicted widow ; to care for the little flock ; to console and defend the orphaned family. These offices are peculiar to the interval between his first and second comings. But He himself is the Church's everlasting guest. As the *Comforter* He will not always be needed ; but as the Holy Spirit He will be needed for ever. The temple cannot be without that which is its glory ; and we are the temple of the Holy Ghost. At present we receive Him specially as the Comforter ; hereafter we shall know Him in other characters and offices. As He is the " eternal Spirit," so He is the Church's eternal guest ; each saint's eternal indweller. " The communion of the Holy Ghost " (2 Cor. xiii. 14) is that which no time, no change can affect ; which neither life nor death, things present, or things to come, can dissolve.

VI. *A Comforter who is the Spirit of truth.* In Him

is all truth ; He is the Spirit of Him who is truth ; He is the Spirit who communicates the truth to the soul. In a world of falsehood and an age of error, how needful is such a Spirit. Truth is that which is congenial to Him ; error that which He hates. It is in opposition to this Spirit of truth that *the lie* of the last days comes specially forth,—“ the strong delusion ” leading men to “ believe the lie.” It is this Spirit of truth that we are to seek fellowship with ; and to do so specially by cultivating the knowledge of the word of his truth.

VII *A Comforter rejected by the world.* The world, or “ seed of the serpent,” or race of the ungodly, see no need for such a Spirit at all. It can do without Him. It is bondage to recognise Him. By means of science, reason, intuition, the verifying faculty, it can do without the Spirit ; it can find its way to truth without surrendering its liberty ! The world “ cannot receive ” Him ; that is, repels and rejects Him ; for it perceives not Him nor his doings nor his sayings ; it is thoroughly ignorant of Him. It prefers to remain without the knowledge of Him at all. The world is not only the rejector of Christ, but of the Holy Ghost. Is not this the special sin of our intellectual age ?

VIII. *A Comforter accepted by all Christ's disciples.* “ Ye know Him ” ! He is no stranger to you. He is your companion, teacher, advocate, friend, comforter. You cannot do without Him. He “ dwelleth with you ” ; He is ever at your side ; He is and shall be *in* you ; filling you as his house, his temple, his holy vessels. Filled with the Spirit, is not that the description of a

Christian man? "Having not the Spirit," is that not the description of a man of the world? O disciple of the Lord, prize this gift of the ascended Christ, even the Comforter. Cherish Him, and delight in his fellowship. Live in the Spirit; walk in the Spirit; pray in the Spirit. Thus shalt thou be a holy and blessed man.

LXXVIII.

THE MIGHTY COMFORTER.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."—JOHN XIV. 26.

CHRIST'S *presence* with his disciples was a blessed thing, and his *absence* would be a blank. Yet there was to be a substitute or successor; one who would comfort them in the Master's absence, and carry on his instructions; bringing the old to remembrance, yet adding new of his own.

It is of this Spirit that our text speaks; not as if He were an unknown being hitherto; but still revealing Him more fully and gloriously than heretofore; the church's birthright; seal; earnest; everything needed during her Lord's absence. To bring out this let us take up the designations here given to Him; not in the exact order in which they occur; but with a slight change in order to bring out the connection of the one with the other. He is, then,—

I. *The Holy Spirit.* As Christ is called "the Word," so He is called "the Spirit," intimating his nature as well as his office. The third person of the Godhead is specially "the Spirit," and "a Spirit;" the truest manifestation of the spiritual character and being of that God who is a

Spirit. He is "the Holy Spirit" through whom the holiness of Godhead specially reveals itself, and is communicated to the creature. He is specially the doer of holy deeds, the speaker of holy words, the maker of holy men. As the Holy Spirit, he dwelt in the Holy One;—and dwells in the church, and in all "saints."

II. *The sent of the Father.* Christ gets this name also,—"he whom the Father hath sent." Both are "sent of God." But the Holy Spirit comes *because of Christ* ("in my name"). Christ came simply as the gift of the Father's love. Christ is the first gift, the Holy Spirit is the second. He comes to us, then, from the Father; the Father's messenger, to do the Father's will in us; the glorifier of the Son; He comes in love, in holy love, as the fruit of Christ's intercession, as the seal set to Christ's name, and the token of the honour with which God honours that name.

III. *The Comforter.* This is his special name in connection with the church,—the Paraclete, or Comforter. "Another Comforter." This is his special office and errand. It is his mission, and He discharges it, not simply because of the covenant or commandment, but in love. He is the Spirit of love. He comes, then, to comfort. To comfort because of what,—under what? (1.) *Christ's absence.* Not to make us content with it, but to cheer us under the blank. (2.) *The sorrows of life.* These are many,—“Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” but under them there is an all-wise, almighty, all-loving Comforter. What sorrow can withstand his consolations? (3.) *The delay of the kingdom.* Even had

there been no tribulation, the delay of the inheritance would have called for patience, and this He supplies. He sustains us under the sickness of deferred hope. Thus He is "the Comforter." He has been so ; is so ; and will be so until the Lord come. Have we used Him as such ? Have we partaken of his fulness ? Have we tasted the abundance of the everlasting consolation which He administers ? Or do we try to be our own comforters ? Do we seek human comforters ? Do we try to forget our sorrows ? Or do we take all to Him, acknowledging his name and mission, and rejoicing at all occasions and opportunities of employing Him as the Comforter ? How much we lose by not going to Him as such, using him as such ?

IV. *The Teacher.* This is another of the names which He has in common with Christ. Christ taught ; Christ teaches still. But now He does this not through the living voice or visible example, but by the agency of the Spirit. He teaches as no man can, as no book can, as no school nor college can. He teaches *all things* ; there is not anything which we need that He will not or cannot teach. He teaches truly, effectually, lovingly. He suits himself to the mental and spiritual state of every scholar. Like Christ, He has "compassion on the ignorant." Let this teacher teach you !

V. *The Remembrancer.* Besides teaching "all things," He is specially to recall the Lord's own words. How often the disciples must have wished for more retentive memories to keep hold of the precious words daily spoken ! Here is something even better than that ;—a

divine memory put at their disposal ;—memory perfect, complete, unerring. Is not this blessed ? How seldom we think of the Spirit's work upon the *memory*. We speak of his enlightening the understanding, renewing the will, changing the heart ; how seldom do we dwell upon his work on the *memory*. Yet here it is. For surely this is not meant to be confined to the disciples. Go, then, to the Holy Spirit for a memory ; and He will make it as retentive as you *need* ; not, perhaps, as you would *like* ; that may not be good for you.

Oh, let us cultivate acquaintance with the three persons in the Godhead. Let us deal with the Spirit about Christ ; and with Christ about the Spirit.

LXXIX.

THE DIVINE LEGACY OF PEACE.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."—JOHN XIV. 27.

SURELY "never man spake like this man"! Well might men wonder at "the gracious words which proceeded out of his lips." Grace was poured into his lips, and out of his lips grace flowed forth to the sons of men. He had the tongue of the learned, that he might speak words in season to the weary (Isaiah l. 4), and blessed were the words he spake to such.

Never did any one enter so deeply and tenderly into our feelings; anticipating, with his words of sympathy and consolation, every sorrow and want! What love is here! What thoughtfulness and sympathy! What majesty too! For who but one who knew that He had come from God and was going to God,—that He Himself was the infinite source of peace,—could say, "Peace I leave with you," &c. The words here uttered are certainly the assurance to us of the love and power of the Promiser. What He has promised, He is able also to perform.

The words are still fresh and new. They can never grow old; for He who spoke them is the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever." They were spoken for us in these last days as truly as for the ages past. Christ meant *us*

when he uttered them. Mark here, (1.) the legacy ; (2.) the gift ; (3.) the contrast ; (4.) the consolation.

I. *The legacy.* "Peace I leave with you." This is the parting gift of one who was about to depart. He Himself was bidding farewell, but he was not to take his peace away along with him. He brought it when he came ("peace on earth") ; and He leaves it behind him as a heavenly relic. His presence had been the source of peace to them, and His absence was not to dry it up. That source would remain the same. Present or absent, far off or near, on earth or in heaven, He was still to be the fountain of their peace. The world would be a blank without Him no doubt ; but he was leaving behind Him a peace which would cheer and gladden. It was not all that they had when He was with them, nor was it all they were to have when He returned ; but still it was much ; enough to comfort, to bless, to shed light upon the darkness of their way. In the world there was to be tribulation, in Him peace. The peace of God was to rule in their hearts. They were to abide in peace, and peace in them !

II. *The gift.* "My peace I give unto you." This is evidently something in addition to the former clause. The peace is not merely something *left*, but positively *given* : "I give." It is not lent or sold, but given ; it is Christ's own gift ; free and unconditional ; His peace is like Himself, a *gift* to us ; unsolicited, unpurchased, unmerited. But the striking expression here is "*my* peace" ; Christ's own peace ; peace altogether peculiar ; transcending in nature and in fulness all other peace. What then was Christ's peace ?

(1.) *It was the peace of a conscience on which there never rested the shadow of a sense of guilt.* It was pre-eminently “a good conscience”; a conscience void of offence. Whence comes our dispeace? From a sense of guilt upon the conscience. It is an evil conscience that disquiets us. The least speck or shadow of guilt breaks our peace. Now in Jesus there was the perfection of a good conscience. Not a shadow ever rested there. It is a blessed thought that there was once here a man like ourselves, whose conscience was never touched with the slightest stain of guilt; who never had to regret one thought, or recall one word, or wish one action undone. What must have been the peace possessed by Him; profound, unutterable; even in the midst of a stormy world. It is into this profound peace of conscience that He would lead us. Of that very peace He would make us partakers. The result of our “receiving” Him, or “believing on his name,” is to bring us into that same state of conscience and that same kind of peace which He who knew no sin possessed. Our vessels are indeed small, and can contain little; His was large, and could contain much. But the kind or quality of that peace which fills them is the same. He has made peace by the blood of His cross; yea, He is our peace; and as soon as we come to know this and take Him as our peace, we are made partakers not merely of peace, but of that which he here calls “my peace.”

2. *It was the peace of one entirely obedient to the Father's will.* It was to do that will that He came; and His life was the doing of it. “I delight to do thy will, O my

God." "Not my will but thine be done." As in all obedience there is peace, so in obedience to such a will, from such a being as the Son, there must have been a peace passing all understanding; a peace altogether infinite; a peace proportioned to the entireness and perfection of the obedience. Such an obedience had never been rendered before; and such a peace had never been possessed, either on earth or heaven, by man or angel. It is into this peace that He leads us,—peace perfect and profound; peace not springing from nor proportioned to *our* obedience, but to *his*; the peace of which his obedience to the Father is at once the foundation and the measure.

3. *It was the peace of one whose peculiar constitution of person made him partaker of peculiar peace.* He was "the Word made flesh"; Son of God and Son of Man; and as such He was a vessel of infinite dimensions; capable of containing a peace such as no one else could do. Into this vessel of infinite capacity all fulness of peace was poured by the Father; and out of this vessel, this peace is poured into us;—not to the same extent, but still in proportion to our capacity. It is of the divine peace of the God-man that we are made partakers. What peace is there like this? As the grapes of Eshcol were of peculiar delicacy, and the cedars of Lebanon of peculiar beauty, and the gardens of Solomon of peculiar fertility and fragrance, so was this peace which filled the Christ of God peculiarly excellent; and of this peculiar peace He gives his saints the promise,—*"My peace I give unto you."*

4. *It was the peace of one whose peculiar relationship to the Father made him possessor of peculiar peace.* There is something in filial peace, the peace of a son, as resulting from the connection between his father and himself, and his own peculiar standing in the house, which cannot well be described. How much more is this true of the peace of Him who is the only begotten Son of God? His must have been peace as special as it was infinite,—the peace poured into the bosom of the beloved Son by the Father himself. This is not the peace of a servant, or a friend, but the peace of a Son,—and such a son! This divine and filial peace, the peace of the only begotten of the Father, He makes over to us as his free gift,—“My peace I give unto you.” And this becomes all the truer and more blessed when they to whom He gives the peace are themselves sons of God! The Father pours a special peace from his paternal bosom into the bosom of his beloved Son; and that Son pours this special peace into the bosom of those who are partakers of his sonship,—truly sons of God!

5. *It was a peace that could never be destroyed.* The peace is like Himself, and like Him from whom He receives it,—eternal and unchangeable,—peace partaking of his character as the eternal One, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It is peace begun now,—given even here,—it is peace to be perpetuated in the eternal kingdom; peace without end, or interruption, or change for ever.

Such is Christ's gift to his own! It is precious, perfect, divine. It is like himself. It is a peace which passeth

all understanding. What a treasure for earth! And what an earnest of the fuller treasure in store for us when He comes again. For great as is the peace which He gives just now, it is nothing to the peace in reserve for us hereafter. He gives it to his own; and He bids all men draw near to become his own! Come unto me and I will give you rest, is his first message; and his second is like unto it,—“My peace I give unto you.”

III. *The contrast.* “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” In all aspects there is a contrast between Christ and the world; with nothing of likeness or sympathy. But it is not of himself that He here speaks, but of his gifts and manner of giving. Christ’s peace and the world’s are opposites; so are his giving and the world’s.

As to the peace;—

(1.) Christ’s peace is perfect, the world’s is partial and imperfect; no depth, no greatness about it. It is and has been a poor meagre thing at its best.

(2.) Christ’s peace reaches the conscience, the world’s does not. It soothes the conscience asleep, but that is all. It intoxicates, but gives no rest to the inner man. It is not the offspring of a purged or pacified conscience.

(3.) Christ’s peace is satisfying, the world’s unsatisfying. The peace which comes in any way, from any region of this evil world, cannot fill. It meets none of our spirit’s cravings and longings. It does not feed our hunger or quench our thirst. It leaves us as empty as before. It speaks peace when there is none.

(4.) Christ’s peace is steady, the world’s wavering. The world itself is unstable, and so are all its gifts;

especially that of peace. This is easily ruffled, easily broken, ever changing.

(5.) Christ's peace is holy, the world's unholy. Christ's peace is everlasting, the world's soon ended. At the longest, the world's peace is but for a lifetime; but seldom does it last half as long; more generally, a day or an hour. Eternal peace is Christ's gift!

As to the giving;—

(1.) Christ's giving is free; none of the world's gifts are such. He gives like himself, and as He gave himself. The world bargains and sells.

(2.) Christ's giving is genuine; the world's is a pretence. The world wishes us peace; this is its daily salutation; but all is hollow. Christ means what He says when He wishes us peace!

(3.) Christ's giving is ungrudging. The world has no pleasure in giving; is not generous and loving. Christ gives as a King,—in full-hearted love; He upbraids not.

(4.) Christ's giving is immediate; that of the world is tardy. The world keeps us waiting. Christ does not. His word is *now*!

(5.) Christ's giving is irrevocable, the world often takes back what it gave. His peace is sure, He does not recall it; nor shall, for ever.

How vivid the contrast! Can any one hesitate in choosing? To reject the world's false peace and to take Christ's true peace, is of all things the most reasonable that can be proposed to man! Consider the contrast well, and act accordingly.

IV. *The consolation.* "Let not your heart be troubled

neither let it be afraid." There will be many things to trouble and terrify in such a world ; a world where all is hatred, enmity, persecution. But against all this provision has been made ; and that provision is the peace of Christ. No doubt, He gives other things also for days of trial,—strength, faith, hope,—but it is his *peace* that is the special antidote,—the pre-eminent sustainer and comforter in evil times.

It is peace ; and it is such a peace ! It keeps the soul unmoved when the tempest is raging round. It makes us feel as if hidden in the hollow of Christ's hand ; defended by his shield ; embraced by his arm. It is light in darkness ; it is a strong tower in the midst of assailing hosts. Let the world reproach or persecute ; we have a peace within which more than meets all its reproaches and persecutions. Let Antichrist and Satan rage ; the divine peace within keeps us immoveable. Let bodily pain assail us ; we are sustained by the peace of Christ. Let sorrow, bereavement, losses, compass us about ; we are kept calm and cheerful by the peace of Christ. Our hearts are not troubled with anxiety or trial ; nor are they afraid in the midst of persecution and reviling.

Christ's peace within us, and Christ himself as our companion by our side, we go forth on our pilgrimage as men who are in possession of a heavenly charm which preserves them in patience and tranquillity ; which makes them invincible ; nay, victorious ; more than conquerors through Him that loved them.

LXXX.

CHRIST IN HEAVEN, THE CHURCH ON EARTH.

"These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father."—JOHN XVI. 25-28.

THESE words seem specially to apply to the state of things, both in heaven and on earth, during the present dispensation. Christ in and from heaven speaking to us plainly of the Father, as well as acting as the High Priest with Urim and Thummim, inquiring and interceding for His own. The Church on earth listening to these revelations of the Father, and asking in his name. In the Old Testament, Messiah (for He is the speaker) spoke in types; when He was here on earth he spoke in parables, or hidden words, figures; but since Pentecost He has spoken "plainly," without a veil or figure. It is this plain revelation of the Father that we have in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles. During this dispensation, too, we have the asking in Christ's name; we have Christ's intercession for us; we have the Father's special love; and we have the special reasons for that special love. Such is a sketch of the passage.

Taking these words then as referring to the present dispensation, we see in them (1) Christ in heaven ; (2) the Church on earth.

I. *Christ in heaven.* He was on earth ; but he has left, and is gone to the Father. It was expedient for us that he should go away, that he might send the Comforter, as if both He and the Spirit could not be spared from heaven at once. But it is not of this mission of the Comforter that he here speaks. He has gone to heaven.

(1.) *As the revealer of the Father.* He came to do this ; He did this while here ; but chiefly in parables,—figures, dark sayings. These were a sort of veil over what he said regarding the Father, even in his last discourses. But when He went up to heaven all that dimness was gone. From the day of Pentecost there was the plain and full revelation of the Father. The Spirit whom He sent down on his apostles, enabling them to preach and to write, spoke *plainly*. The Epistles contain this plain revelation of the Father. There may be in them something hard to be understood, but still they are the plainest and fullest revelations of God that man has had. It is this unfolding of God and his ways and thoughts that the world so specially needed and needeth still. Acquaintanceship with God is the removal of the world's darkness, and the healing of all its wounds. We look upwards to the heaven of heavens where Jesus is ; we listen to His voice, and in what He speaks we have the plain discovery of the Father.

(2.) *As the medium of communication between us and the Father.* He is in heaven as Advocate, Intercessor,

High Priest. As such He carries on the intercourse between us and God. Through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. "I say not that I will pray (or make inquiries for you like the high priest with Urim and Thummim) the Father ; for the Father himself loveth you" ; that is, "I need not say that I will thus act as your High Priest, and yet this is not because the Father requires to be persuaded to love you ; for He loves you already." Christ, then, is the communicator between us and God. Whatever we need, let us take it to Him ; if any man lack wisdom, let us thus ask. Jesus is our High Priest. Let us deal with him.

II. *The Church on earth.* Jesus leaves his saints here, yet He keeps up constant intercourse with them. Heaven and earth are brought together ; as if all were nearness and not distance. In this passage we have the Church on earth.

(1.) *Receiving Christ's revelations of the Father.* He speaks, and *she* listens. His lessons are all of the Father ; and thus she learns from His lips more and more each day of the Father's character, and ways, and mind, and works. As a willing listener to what Jesus speaks of the Father, she goes upon her way here, and does the Father's work. She learns each day more fully the meaning of the marvellous words, "God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." It is this revelation of the Father that we preach as glad tidings of great joy. This fills our hearts and imparts the unearthly peace, the unworldly joy, which, as believing men, we possess.

(2.) *Praying in Christ's name.* In a sense that name had been known from the beginning. The seed of the woman, with the bruised heel, was known as he through whom all communications were made between the sinner and God. On the credit of His name prayer got its answer all along. Not one petition was accepted, except in virtue of that name. But still the name was but dimly known; and besides it was not known as the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Henceforth round that name all prayer was to cluster. In that name it was to be presented. That name was to bear it aloft. That name was to secure its success. That name was, by its own omnipotence, to make every one connected with it omnipotent too. Christ gives us this name to make use of in all our dealings with God. We need nothing else. This will secure the abundant answer. Never let us go to God without that name; and going with it, let us be confident; trusting, not distrusting; believing, not doubting. Let the virtue, the power, the efficacy of that name be ever realized. Let us not dishonour it by distrust. He who goes to God without it, dishonours it. He who professes to go with it, yet doubts whether it will avail to secure an answer for *his* prayers, no less dishonours it. Let the thought of that name remove all doubt on our part. That name removes all ground for refusal on the part of God. It enables him to give full vent to its infinite liberality and love.

(3.) *Enjoying the Father's love.* "The Father himself loveth you." This is no doubtful thing; but as sure as it is blessed. It is this love that is the sunshine of life.

The Father's love ! Yes ; it is written, "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them." He loves them as lovers of his Son. He loves them as believers in the mission of that Son to earth. What love is there like this ? And what can brighten or sweeten life like this ?

(4.) *Loving the Son.* "Ye have loved me." The Church is the lover of Christ. In an unloving world she loves Him whom the Father loveth. This marks her out from all around. To her He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. "My beloved" is the name she gives Him. What He desires is love, our love. What He wants is possession of our hearts. The question that He asks is "lovest thou me."

(5.) *Believing that He came out from God.* This is the first thing, though here it comes last. The Father presents him to us as His beloved Son ; sent from God, to do the work of God. The first way in which we honour Him is by receiving Him as the Son, the Sent of the Father. Our recognition of Him as such brings us into the circle of discipleship. Believing the Father's testimony to the Son, we ourselves become sons, and as such receive the fulness of the Father's love.

What think ye then of Christ ? Dost thou believe that He is the Son of God ; that He came out from God, and has gone back to God ; not only as the Father's servant to do the Father's will, but in love to us, and as the messenger of the Father's love.

LXXXI.

TRIBULATION, PEACE, AND VICTORY.

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—JOHN XVI. 33.

HERE are four special points,—the peace, the tribulation, the victory, the cheer. It is Christ himself who is the speaker of these words. He speaks them to us. Let us listen.

I. *The peace.* Peace is the great Bible subject; the burden of God's message to men. Peace on earth; peace with God; the peace of conscious reconciliation. But it is not so much “peace with God” that is here referred to, as “the peace of God”; not the peace obtained by receiving the embassy of peace, the reconciliation, but the peace of the reconciled soul. Into this region of peace reconciliation is the entrance. Here no wrath can reach us, no storm can ruffle us, no terror can appal us; we are “kept in perfect peace”; “the peace of God rules in our hearts,” and is perpetual sunshine, like an island of bright verdure in the midst of a stormy sea. It is peace *in Christ*; not out of Him, nor apart from Him, but *in Him*. It flows out of Him to us; or rather we are in Him, and so get that peace. We get it by means of his words; “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.” His words are the words of peace.

The soul that listens to these words drinks in the peace, or, we may say, breathes the air of peace. Look at his words, "Let not your heart be troubled"; "In my Father's house are many mansions;" "The Father coming in and abiding;" the love of the Father; the little while; the coming joy. Yes, every word is loaded with peace; his own peace; the Father's peace; the Spirit's peace; the peace of heaven; peace even here on an earth, where all is trouble and disquiet.

II. *The tribulation.* Though not *of* the world, we are in it still. We are partakers of its *sorrows*, though not of its *sins*. And besides, the men of the world hate us and trouble us, as they hated and troubled our Master. So that we have tribulation both in and from the world. The prince and god of this world is against us, and assails us on every side, as the old serpent, the tempter, the roaring lion, the ruler of the darkness of this world. Our separation from it, and non-conformity to it, make it the more hostile. It will not let us alone. It is a waste howling wilderness; a land of storms, and barrenness, and enemies, and thorns, and briars. The law of the Church's present state is "tribulation"; "Through much *tribulation* we must enter the kingdom;" "These are they which came out of great *tribulation*." There is the weakness of this "vile body": weariness, vexation, disappointment, bereavement, breaking of ties, farewells and partings, bodily diseases, pain, affliction, poverty, loss, disaster, straitened circumstances, persecutions, coldness, hatred, the sneer and taunt,—of these things the world is full. Its atmosphere is impregnated with the evil, and sadness, and

gloom. Thus has it been from the beginning ; we see it in Abel, Noah, Joseph, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and all the saints. It is the Church's portion here. It was the portion of her head. He was a man of sorrows. And all this not because of inconsistency, but consistency ; the more we are unlike the world, the more it hates us ; the more we are like the Lord, the more will the world persecute us. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent cannot agree or love. Hence we must come out from it ; stand aloof, whatever may be the consequences. And this non-conformity,—this quarrel between us and the world,—only makes us long more for the day of the great advent. Tribulation makes us long for the coming ; death makes us long for resurrection ; weariness makes us long for rest ; partings make us long for meetings. Thus we look for, and hasten unto, the coming of the day of God, the ending of the sorrow, the beginning of the joy.

III. *The victory.* "I have overcome the world." It is a powerful world, but not all-powerful. It has been fought with and overcome. One greater than it, or than its prince, has come and vanquished it. The world did its utmost in this battle, but the Son of God prevailed. The seed of the woman bruised the serpent's head. Noah condemned the world, but Christ overcame it. It has now no longer any power left to it but what He permits. He overcame it both by weakness and by strength ; He slew death by dying ; He conquered Satan, the god of this world, by allowing Satan to conquer Him. He did it alone. None could help Him in such a battle. Yet

the victory was complete, final, and irreversible. He is the conqueror; and, as the conquerer, led captivity captive. When He comes again, the victory will be manifested; now we only know it by faith. God has proclaimed the victory of his Son both in heaven and earth, but the world believes it not. Yet the victory was great and glorious. It was a victory which decided the long battle between heaven and hell; between God and Satan; between the Church and the spiritual weakness in high places.

IV. *The cheer.* Be of good cheer or courage. Be not afraid of the world, or its prince, or its tribulations.

(1.) *It is a conquered world.* Not in its full strength or flushed with victory, but routed, discomfited. Even at its strongest it had but creature strength, and "Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?" It is now creature-weakness; a broken world. Be of good cheer!

(2.) *It is conquered for you.* The victor fought your fight and won your victory. The world is his foe and yours; as both He fought and won; He was a leader and commander to the people, the Captain of your salvation. It was *you* He had in view when He was fighting. He will make you more than conqueror. Be of good cheer.

(3.) *It is conquered by Christ.* Conquered by your Saviour, your friend. The conqueror is almighty, and his victory has been acknowledged by the Father. It was Jesus who fought and won. Be of good cheer.

Not merely do not yield to despondency, like Elijah

and Jonah, but rejoice and be exceeding glad. Be cheerful in days of darkness. You have still a battle which you must fight cheerfully and hopefully. It is "that which is behind of Christ's battle," the last relics of the fight. Fight, and yield not. Love not the world, but contend against it. Be faithful to death ; the promise is to him that overcometh.

LXXXII.

THE DECLARATION OF THE FATHER'S NAME.

"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."—JOHN XVII. 26.

HERE is (1.), the name; (2.) the Declarer of it; (3.) the end or object of this declaration.

I. *The name.* It is the Father's name; the name of Godhead. The name of a thing expresses its qualities and characteristics. The name of a person of old did the same. So the name of God is that which reveals the mind, and heart, and character of God. The name of God is manifold, bringing out various aspects of Godhead. This name may be read on the *works* of God; this world He created; sun, moon, and stars. But the *word* contains the name more fully: "Thou hast magnified thy word, above all thy name." But there are portions of the word in which the name is summed up, as in Exod. xxxiv. 6: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." And this especially was that which the Son of God came to declare. That name of *grace* shone out legibly and brightly in Him. He came in the Father's *name*, to reveal that *name*; to embody it in His person, so that every one who saw or heard Him, might see and hear the name. "God is love"; "God rich in mercy"; "God loved the world,"—these are fragments, or letters, or syllables of the great name.

II. *The Declarer of it.* Man had often tried to utter the name of God, but had failed. He could not comprehend it, and he could not utter it, nor make it known. There was but stammering and distortion. Only *He* could utter it who came from the Father, and who knew Him, as only the Son could do. He came to earth as the revealer of the Father, and the Father's name. He knew that name well; and when He said, "Abba, Father," and "righteous Father," and "holy Father," and "our Father," He spoke as one who knew it; as one who was seeking to make others know it, and so to be partakers of His confidence and joy. But how, and when, and where did He declare it? In every way, at every time, and in every place during his sojourn here. As every star, and leaf, and flower, and mountain, and stream are, in their province, declarers of the name of God, so (only much more) were each look, and word, and deed, and step of the Lord Jesus declarers of the Father's name. He declared it,

(1.) *By His birth.* Bethlehem was the first place made to echo with the Father's name. The lowly birth, the stable, the manger, all said, "God is love."

(2.) *By his private life.* His thirty years at Nazareth were all, though in ways unknown to us, declarers of the Father's names. These unrecorded years were not wholly silent nor inarticulate. They said, "God is love."

(3.) *His words.* They are few in comparison with what might have been received. Yet they are enough to declare the name most fully. Each word He spoke is a revelation of the Father. It tells us something of the

mind and heart of God, which otherwise we could not have known. It says to us, "God is love."

(4.) *His deeds.* His life was one of miracles; and all of these illustrative of the Father's character; all of them utterances of the Father's name. Each of them spoke out articulately, and said, "God is love."

(5.) *His death and resurrection.* His cross and grave, each of them in its own way, declared the Father's name." He who came to die, and to rise, did so because "God so loved the world." How clearly, how loudly, how fully, did the death and resurrection of the Son of God proclaim, "God is love."

In all these ways He was the declarer of the Father's name; the revealer of His character; the embodiment, as well as the proclamation of His grace. And He not only says, "*I have declared,*" but "I will declare"; as if all the future as well as all the past were to be one glorious declaration of the divine name. That declaration is not done. It is now going on in heaven. It will go on on earth again when He returns to make all things new. Then God's name shall not only be revealed, but "hallowed"; and on the forehead of the redeemed is to be written in the ages to come, "their Father's name." Throughout the ages of the eternal kingdom, that name shall continue to be declared, on earth and in heaven. That name is what the creature needs to know; specially what man needs to know. In it are wrapt up the blessedness, the glory of the universe.

III. *The end and object of this declaration.* "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I

in them." The declaration of the Father's name is *for our sakes*, that we through the knowledge of that name might have the fulness of the Father's love poured into us, and that Christ Himself might make his abode with us. It is not *directly* of the love of the Father to us that Christ here speaks, but the love of the Father to *Himself*, "the love wherewith thou hast loved me." Elsewhere He speaks of this love as one with, or commensurate with, His own to us: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." But here it is of the Father's love to the Son as poured into us through the knowledge of the divine name as given us by Christ, that He is speaking to us, so that the result of Christ's revelation of the Father's name, or rather of our believing that revelation, would be twofold.

(1.) *The Father's love to the Son would come in to us.* What a love! In *His* case it was all merited; in ours, unmerited; but still, not the less is it true and boundless. It comes in and dwells in us. It is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost; and thus we are filled with all the fulness of God.

(2.) *Christ Himself would come in to us.* He would abide with us and fill us. Through the knowledge which He gives us of the Father's name, He himself comes in to us! How simple, how immediate, and how free. Believing Christ's revelation of the Father's name, we get all Christ Himself.

LXXXIII.

RITUALISM AND THE CROSS.

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment; and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.”—JOHN XVIII. 28.

THESE “rulers of the Jews” and the multitude that followed them, were thorough “Ritualists.” It was their Ritualism that urged them on to crucify the Son of God. For Christ and Ritualism are opposed to each other as light is to darkness. The true cross in which Paul gloried, and the cross in which modern ceremonialists glory, have no resemblance to each other. The cross and the crucifix cannot agree. Either ritualism will banish Christ, or Christ will banish ritualism. They cannot possibly co-exist.

It is the ritualism of these Jews,—Pharisees, and Scribes, and Priests,—that comes out here. It was this that kept them out of Pilate’s hall,—for the touch of a Gentile, or anything belonging to a Gentile, would pollute them. They could not, in that case, eat the Passover. And the Passover was simply to them a rite by which they thought to recommend themselves to God and pacify their own consciences. It was their God, their Messiah, their Saviour, their religion.

Ritualism, or sacerdotalism, or externalism, or tradi-

tionalism, are all different forms of self-righteousness; man's self-invented ways of pleasing or appeasing God, or paying for admittance into the kingdom. And these forms of self-righteousness are also forms of religious materialism, devout externalism. They are a human apparatus or machinery for performing a certain thing called worship, or procuring a thing called pardon; they are the means by which the performer of them hopes to win God's favour,—perhaps, also, man's praise,—most certainly, his own esteem.

If there could be a righteousness or merit from any kind of human performances, it would have been under the Old Testament, for then all the ceremonies were *divine*. Man did not originate or invent them. They were all ordained by God. Awful as was the mistake of the Jew in making a saviour or a righteousness of these, it was not half so awful or so unnatural as making a saviour or a righteousness out of the performance of certain rites called Christian, invented wholly by man, without God's command, nay, in defiance of it. And every act, or performance, or ceremony, that honours self, exalts self, gives prominence to self, is an accursed thing; an abomination in the sight of God, however religious, or sacred, or solemn, or devout, it may seem to man.

It is to self-righteousness in some form or other that man is always tending; under Christianity no less than under Judaism. On the one hand, we see men trying to believe that human nature is not so very bad after all; and on the other, men professing to believe that it is bad, trying to make up for this badness, or to cover it over, by

works, and devotions, and ceremonies. All this is pure self-righteousness.

The touch-stone of this ritualism, or religionism, or self-righteousness, is the true cross of Christ. Let us look at it in this light; especially as exhibited in the narrative under notice; for here it is that, for the first time, self-righteousness comes in direct contact with the cross.

I. *The religion of self-righteousness.* In the case of these Jews it was keeping the passover; observing a feast. That was religion! It was all the religion they had; it was their all for acceptance with God; their all for eternity. Their answer to the Judge at the judgment-seat would be, "I kept your passovers." As if there were any religion in eating and drinking! The religion of self-righteousness in our day is like this;—works, feelings, fancies, music, rites, festivals, fasts, gestures, postures, garments;—that is religion! It is something which gratifies self; which pleases the natural man; which makes a man think well of himself; which gives a man something to do or to feel in order to earn pardon and merit heaven.

II. *The scruples of self-righteousness.* These Jews would not enter a Gentile hall. The touch of its floor or walls would be pollution. Religion and irreligion were to them something outward; something with which the body, not the soul, had to do. After touching these, or breathing such air, they would themselves be defiled. Their scruples all turned on their own self-esteem. Pride, religious pride, was at the root. They were thoroughly

blind to all that constituted *real* pollution, and saw only the false. They were scrupulous about entering a Gentile hall, when yet they were seeking to slay a righteous man, nay, to crucify the Lord of glory. What was the value of such scruples? What was their meaning? These men could swallow the camel while they were straining out a gnat. They could murder the innocent; yet they were too holy to set their foot on a Gentile floor. Such is the way in which self-righteousness acts itself out! Such is the pride of ecclesiastical caste!

III. *The deeds of self-righteousness.* These were many. Some looked very religious,—fasting, praying, almsgiving, Others not so. In the present case, the great deed of self-righteousness is the crucifying of the Lord of glory. That cross was the monument of self-righteousness. It was this that cried, Away with him; crucify him; not this man but Barabbas. So with modern self-righteousness in every form; especially in the form of ritualism and formalism. It is ever against Christ that self-righteousness shews its hatred, and aims its strokes. Ritualism is man's expression of dislike to Christ. It is the modern way of crucifying Christ afresh, and putting Him to an open shame.

IV. *The connection between this deed and the religion.* Christ and self-righteousness cannot be on terms of friendship, for Christ, in his grace and finished work and free salvation, is wholly antagonistic to all forms of self-righteousness. The Jews felt that He was crossing their path, that He was hewing down their temple, that He was utterly making void all their religion; and hence

they hated Him; hence they crucified Him. It was self-righteous religion that crucified the Son of God.

All rites and ceremonies, whether old or new, are man's ways of getting rid of Christ. They get rid of real religion by means of that which looks like religion, but which is not religion at all. What can all these things do? Can they save? Can postures save? Can dresses save? Can candles, lighted or unlighted, save? Can music save? Can architecture save? Can cathedrals save? Nay, can they even point the way to Jesus? Do they not lead away from Him? Do they not make void the cross, and trample on the blood?

LXXXIV.

THE GREATER SIN.

“Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”—JOHN XIX. 11.

THESE words are directed against *the Jews*, though spoken to Pilate. They are a declaration of the great guilt of the Jewish nation and its rulers, in asking Pilate to exercise his God-given authority against the Son of God. Pilate has not yet committed the sin of condemning Christ; he was urged to it; he hesitated; he shrunk from it; and our Lord here utters the words of warning, to deter him from the consummation of his great crime. “Not the Roman emperor, but my Father; not the people, but my Father, gave you this power, and set you in that place where you have now to judge me, His Son; and these, His enemies and mine, are now asking you to exercise this power given you from above against me, the Son of God, who came from above.” As when speaking to *Simon* (Luke vii. 44) he turned to the *woman*, so here, when speaking to Pilate, he turned to the *Jews*.

The sin here spoken of is not so much Pilate's as Israel's. He did what he did “ignorantly and in unbelief”; *they* knew, *he* knew not; he thought he was only exercising his lawful power in the usual way, as a Roman governor. Israel knew the Scriptures concerning Messiah;

Pilate did not ; and the "greater sin" was committed by men who, with the Scriptures in their hand, called on him who had not these Scriptures to condemn their own Messiah.

This power of Pilate was acknowledged by the Jews, by Judas, by Annas, by Caiaphas. They appealed to him as one who had the power to "crucify" and to "release." Hence their sin, their special sin ; their "greater sin,"—greater than in any ordinary case, greater than that of Pilate. It was "greater sin," because they knew what they did ; and because they were making use of the God-given power of another, as well as taking advantage of his ignorance, to perpetrate a crime, which, in its lowest aspect, was the condemnation of the innocent, in its highest, the condemnation of their own Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Pilate's power was "from above," (1) *as governor*. There is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God ; the source of earthly power is heavenly ; not in man or from man, but from the King of kings, the Prince of the kings of the earth. The recognition of this lies at the root of all true politics. Earthly crowns and thrones and sceptres are thus linked with that one heavenly crown and throne and sceptre. Kings and magistrates are, by reason of their *office*, responsible to God. Not *personally*, as other men merely ; but *officially*, as rulers, they are directly responsible. It is just *because of their office* that they are so peculiarly accountable, and so solemnly bound to do everything to the glory of God. It is just because of their office, *and not merely as other*

men, that they are bound to consecrate everything which their office gives them power over to the service of Him from whom they have received their power. (2.) *As a Gentile governor*. The Jews had, for their sins, been given over to Gentile dominion, till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. So that in a double sense Pilate's power was not his own, nor from Rome, nor from the people. In a double sense it came from God, and was therefore to be specially used for God. He might not know all this ; but Israel knew it ; for their prophets, Daniel especially, had taught them this ; and therefore they had the "greater sin." That God's purpose embraced something more than this, and had reference to the crucifixion of Messiah, is true ; but that the appeal here made by our Lord to Pilate, though having special reference to Himself, is founded on a broader and more general truth seems evident.

(1.) *Even a bad man's power is from God*. Our Lord affirms this of Pilate ; and of Pilate when using that power for the perpetration of the greatest crime ever committed in our world. Let no one therefore point to the crimes of kings, or the sins of magistrates, and say, Can the power of these men be given them from above ? Look at Pilate. Listen to our Lord's words ; or hear Paul when, in the days of Nero, he said (referring to the words of our Lord), "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers" (ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις, authorities holding from above) ; and when he proclaims civil government to be "the ordinance of God" ; nay, when he calls the monarch or magistrate "the minister of God."

(2.) *His using his God-given power for a bad purpose is allowed of God.* He is free to act ; but he is responsible to God for his actings. God overrules his wickedness, and employs him as His instrument for carrying out his purposes. He ought to use his power for a good purpose ; not for condemning the Son of God, but for honouring Him ; and when he abuses his authority, he is doubly guilty ; though that guilt is made use of by God for the development of His own purposes, as in the death of His own Son at the hands of Pilate. That the power which Pilate used was conferred by God only, made his act, as well as that of the Jews, the more criminal. What a reckoning is at hand with the kings of earth, for the abuse of their power ! (See Psalm lxxxii.)

(3.) *God makes him His instrument.* He is free. He might use his power for a good purpose ; yet even when he uses it for a bad one, he is overruled of God. It is God's "determinate counsel" that comes out here (Acts ii. 23). Like Pharaoh working out Israel's deliverance, so is Pilate here working out the Church's deliverance, according to the purpose of God.

The following truths come out here,—

(1.) *The thing which Pilate was preparing to do would have been sin in any circumstances ;* even if his power was not given from above. It was the condemnation of an innocent man. It was might trampling on right.

(2.) *It was greater sin, because the power was from above.* It was abusing, for unrighteousness, the power received from the God of righteousness.

(3.) *It was still greater sin to use this God-given power*

to crucify the Son of God. The moment man gets into power, he uses it against God and against his Christ.

(4.) *It was yet greater sin in Israel to deliver up their own Messiah to be crucified by him who had this power.* It was as much as calling on God to crucify his own Son. It was daring sin, committed with their eyes open. Pilate's sin was great ; Israel's was greater far. Pilate, beware of thy sin, for it is great ; Israel, beware of thy sin, for it is far greater. Thus He warns both at once ; and bids them beware of the sin of crucifying the Lord of glory.

LXXXV.

CHRIST'S WORK IN HEAVEN, AND OURS ON EARTH.

"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not ; for I am not yet ascended to my Father : but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God."—JOHN XX. 17.

THIS passage is very generally taken to mean, "Do not so cling to me, you will have other opportunities of meeting me, for I shall not be going to my Father for some time yet." But (1) it is doubtful whether "touch" can mean this; (2) this meaning does not accord with the reason, which is "I have not yet gone," not "I am not yet going"; (3) the treatment of Thomas, who was allowed to touch, is at variance with this.

Looking into the words, we shall discover a truer sense. The command is, "touch me not"; the reason is, "I am not yet ascended," &c. Very little had passed between the Lord and Mary. He had said, "Mary"; she had replied, "Rabboni," accompanying the word with some significant look and gesture, which the Lord quite understood. To this look and gesture, or rather to the thought which they indicated, our Lord replies. For it was his custom to direct his answers to the *thoughts* more than to the *words* of his disciples; Luke ix. 47, "Jesus perceiving the thought of their heart."

Christ's words, then, are directed to Mary's thought. She had sprung forward to embrace Him, under the impression that all He had spoken of before his death was now done ; that He had been to the Father, and that He was now come again to receive his own to Himself. "Now all is fulfilled," she thought ; "He has returned from the Father ; He is going to take us to his kingdom ; we shall be for ever with Him." No, not yet, is Christ's answer ; you speak and act as if all were done. Not so. I have more work to do, and *you* have more work to do ; we must separate again ; I to do my work, you to do yours.

There is a remarkable difference between Mary's case and that of Thomas. She believed too much ; he too little. She was all faith,—faith too hasty in its conclusions ; he was all unbelief,—unbelief refusing to believe even that this was his Master. Her too eager faith is corrected by the Touch me not, but Go, &c. ; his unbelief is removed by the "Reach hither thy hand," &c. Each is treated with marvellous wisdom, and gentleness, and love. How unlike man's way of dealing ! He would have said to faith, Touch me ; to unbelief, Touch me not. But the skill of the divine physician is as conspicuous in his treatment of the two cases as is his love.

The mistake which is here corrected by the Lord, is a very natural one, and of a very blessed kind. It is simply that of too great eagerness ; ante-dating the joy of the kingdom, of the marriage-feast ; saying too soon, "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone," &c. It is a mistake not so common with us as with the early

Christians, who, like Mary, seemed to be every moment counting on entering into the joy of the Lord.

The substance, then, of the Lord's exhortation is, "be calm and patient ; he that believeth doth not make haste ; *I* have work to do, which must be done before we sit down together in my Father's house ; and you the same. Let us consider these two things then,—Christ's work, our work.

I. *Christ's work.* He has gone to the Father ; He is now at his right hand ; and when that work is done we shall be admitted to touch Him ; admitted to his joy ; to drink the new wine with Him in his kingdom. What, then, is the work He has gone to do ? He has gone—

(1.) *To get the Spirit for us.* Not till He was glorified was the Spirit given in its fulness. Now He has received for us the promise of the Father,—gifts for men. He is now the possessor and dispenser of the Holy Ghost.

(2.) *To intercede for us.* His work of intercession is now going on in heaven ; He ever liveth to intercede for us ; He is our advocate with the Father ; our forerunner, appearing in the presence of God for us.

(3.) *To prepare a place for us.* In his Father's house are many mansions ; more than enough for the great multitude that no man can number. In these He has gone to prepare a place for us. What that preparation is we know not ; how long it may take we know not. But it is going on just now and when it is done He will come again and receive us to Himself, that where He is there we may be also.

(4.) *To give repentance and forgiveness.* For this

specially He is exalted. This work He has been carrying on since Pentecost, when the first instalment was exhibited. He is doing it daily still.

Thus, then, He cautions us,—be calm, be patient, haste not, fret not; I have gone to do my work. It must be done, and then no more delay.

II. *Our work.* Touch me not, said the Lord, but go,—go and tell. Mary hasted, and did what her Lord commanded. She had something else to do than touching or enjoying. She had work. So have we. We have—

(1.) *Work for ourselves.* It is work expressed in such exhortations as these: follow me, take up your cross, deny self, work while it is day, let your light shine, grow in grace, pray without ceasing.

(2.) *Work for the church.* We are members of one body, helping each other, bearing each other's burdens, comforting each other, strengthening each other's hands, binding up each other's wounds, supplying each other's wants.

(3.) *Work for the world.* We are called out of the world, not to take no interest in it, but to pity and pray for it. Let our eye be on dying men; seeking to save them, pulling them out of the fire, reproving, warning, inviting, beseeching. We have much of this work to do, and little time to do it in.

Christ's work in heaven and ours on earth will soon be done. Then it will no longer be, Touch me not; but, Come ye blessed. We shall sit down under his shadow; He shall say, Come with me from Lebanon; open to me my

sister, my love ; and it shall be said, Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved ; and we shall say, Let Him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. Then shall we touch Him without rebuke, sitting down with Him at the marriage supper, and shall ever be for ever with the Lord.

LXXXVI.

THE TENDER LOVE OF THE RISEN CHRIST.

“*Children, have ye any meat?*”—JOHN XXI. 5.

IT was a *risen* Christ that put this question ; thus He is shewn to be the same Saviour still ; cross and grave have not quenched His love ; nor has resurrection made Him forget them, or raised Him above sympathy with them.

The question pertained to the wants of the *body*. His resurrection-body was still in sympathy with their body. He felt their pain, and want, and cold, and hunger, just as He did before. The higher He rose, the deeper and more perfect were His sympathies. He could hunger no more, neither thirst any more, nor be weary more ; yet all this but made Him the more keenly alive to such sufferings and privations in His brethren.

The question which He put is one which He did not need to put ; He could have answered it Himself ; He knew they had no meat,—that all the night they had toiled, but caught nothing. Yet He wishes to speak to them as a man,—as a friend interested in their welfare. That question is His method of approaching them ; His morning salutation ; the first link between them ; the going out of His heart to call out theirs. He awakens their confidence, *as a stranger*, an unknown friend ; and then, ere they are aware, the stranger-dress is dropt, and

Jesus, their Master, is revealed. Blessed surprise ! Such as that with Mary at the tomb ; such as that with the disciples on the Emmaus road ; as if He delighted in these surprises of love. Man all over in everything but sin, both before and after his resurrection.

The question here indicates such things as these,—watchfulness, pity, bounty ; and though these were exhibited in connection with *bodily* need, not the less are they found in Him, in connection with the soul and its deeper, more eternal wants, and in connection with the church, His body, and her infinite wants. Let us note then,

I. *The watchfulness of the risen Christ.* He looks down on His flock, and marks each sheep and lamb with more than a shepherd's eye. The glory, the blessedness, the abundance with which He is surrounded, do not make Him *unwatchful*. Amid His own plenty, He remembers the poverty, and hunger, and cold, and nakedness of His scattered flock below. He watches each one. The want of one meal for the body was observed by Him, that morning in Galilee ; we may be sure that He marks the want of sustenance, whether for soul or body, in the least of his members. Poor saint, you never lacked a meal, a crust, but Jesus noticed it, and asked the question, on purpose to supply your want, "My child, have you any meat?" You never lacked even one spiritual meal, at any time, but He put the same question. He watches the hunger and thirst of His church on earth, and is unceasingly putting the question to it,—to each congregation,—to each saint : Children, have ye any meat? Nothing escapes his vigilant eye. "I know thy poverty," He says ;

I know thy hunger, thy thirst, thy weariness, thy weakness, thy sighs and tears.

II. *The pity of the risen Christ.* "I have compassion on the multitudes," He once said, "because they have continued with me three days, and have nothing to eat." Such was His pity before His resurrection. Our text shews us His pity after it. And we are sure that the throne has not lessened that pity. He pities His church's hunger and leanness; each saint's hunger and leanness. It is in profoundest pity that he asks the question of each of us, Children, have ye any meat? Surrounded by the abundance in His Father's house above, he pities us in this wilderness, this land of famine, where want compasses us about. Oh let us learn the compassion of the risen and ascended Christ. Let us trust it in every hour of want. Never did earthly father pity a starving child as He pities us.

III. *The bounty of the risen Christ.* His is no empty pity. He does not *say* merely, Be ye warmed and filled. He at once opens his treasure-house, and supplies us, as Joseph his brethren. His stores are boundless. He has bread enough and to spare. He has no pleasure in our hunger. He delights to pour out His plenty; nay, and to provide channels for its flowing down to us,—as in the case of His disciples, when He filled their nets, and kindled the fire, and prepared the meal with His own hands. He opens his hands, and supplies every want. He replenishes the church's basket and store. He fills the cruse and meal barrel of his widowed church here in the day of famine. And this is His voice

to her now,—His voice in every age, His voice in these last days: “Children, have ye any meat?” Perhaps we have to answer, No. There is cleanness of teeth; a famine, not of bread, nor water, but of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos viii. 11). No; we are famishing; our spiritual meals are scanty; our leanness, our leanness! Then He comes and spreads a table in the wilderness. He feeds us with the finest of the wheat. He gives us His own flesh to eat; and His flesh is meat indeed. Such is His tender love, His infinite bounty.

After He has fed them, and thus renewed the tokens of His love and care; after that, in silent awe, they had feasted together by that wondrous lake, He breaks silence by putting the question, “Loves thou me?” He puts it to the most jealous of His disciples, much more to all of us. And this is the sound of His voice, which we now hear, putting to us the question, “Lovest thou me?” What is our answer? We said at once, No, when He asked about our food; shall we not as explicitly say, Yes, when He asks, “Lovest thou me?”





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